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Epistemic modalities and the discourse particles of Singapore

Running head: Epistemic modalities in Singapore

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0. Introduction

In this paper I use data from a contact variety of English used in Singapore, Singlish, to illustrate some of the issues in the definition of discourse particles. I take one of the major problems in the analysis of discourse particles to be definitional, and adopt an approach that rigidly distinguishes the functional elements from the syntactic. This involves a distinction (based on the theories of Givón) between **functional systems**, which can be encoded in a range of ways; and **syntactic systems**, which encode functions.

Syntactic systems are multi-level. At a high level of syntax, **discourse markers** are constituents that are 'peripheral' to the syntax of the sentence or clause to which they relate in the sense that they can be omitted without resulting in an ungrammatical structure, and that their omission does not change the truth value of the sentence (Rouchota 1998:97; there is general agreement on this definition, used in most other papers in this volume). This syntactic category of discourse marker encodes various functions, especially connectivity (and management of dialogue in various other ways), and marking speaker attitude or stance. Unlike most of the other contributors to this volume (except Ler, who is working on the same variety

as I am), I intend to make a further distinction which is relevant for only some languages. In English, the subject of a verb can be a noun phrase or a clause; similarly, the constituent of discourse marker can be filled by a number of syntactic structures, such as a word, a phrase or a clause. But there is, in some codes, a distinct word class of **discourse particles**, which function only as discourse markers (such languages have other discourse markers which are not discourse particles; see Yang in this volume). Singlish, a contact variety of English, is one such code, as are varieties of Chinese. Such a word class is argued for in most Germanic languages, and other papers in this volume make a similar contrast between markers and particles (for example Weydt, Aijmer et al, Frank-Job). Some, like me, require 'particles' to be single words, while others use the term to refer to lexicalised items of more than one word. In some languages, the particles form a discrete word class, without semantically-related homophones in other word classes -- this is not the case with German.

Across languages, discourse particles (so-defined) are used in various discourse marker functions, and serve various functional systems. The specific functional system on which I focus below is **epistemic modality**, which is one of the systems especially likely to be associated with discourse markers and (in those languages which have them) especially with discourse particles. This analysis may help to clarify issues in languages that do not have a dedicated word class of discourse particles, such as Standard English.

0.2. Singlish

My analysis draws on data drawn from recordings of natural conversational of native speakers of Singlish (for further information, see Gupta 1994). In order to have access to native speakers of the contact variety who have as yet little skill in StdE, my principal conversational data came from children in the early years of formal education. I have also used written examples from ad hoc sources, and, where necessary for clarity, have constructed examples. In this paper I also supply illustrative texts from written sources.

Singlish is a contact variety (Weinreich 1953) of English, with a lexicon almost entirely drawn from English, and a grammar that is significantly different from varieties of English that have experienced ‘continuous transmission’ from generation to generation (Thomason and Kaufman 1988). The substrate of Singlish is complex, and under dispute. Some of the particles have come into Singlish directly from the donor languages (Cantonese and Hokkien) but many have come via contact varieties of Malay, one of which (‘Bazaar Malay’) was widely used as a lingua franca until the late twentieth century, and another of which (‘Baba Malay’) was spoken by a group of ethnic Chinese residents (the ‘Straits Chinese’, also known as the ‘Baba Chinese’/ ‘Peranakan’ / ‘King’s Chinese’) (Gupta 1994; the alternative history is suggested by Bao 2001). In form, Singlish is very similar to (and has a common origin with) informal varieties of Malaysian and Bruneian English, although the current social context of English in Singapore, where it is the most dominant official language, and the medium of all education, is rather

different from the social contexts in Malaysia and Brunei, where Malay is dominant.

Singlish functions in a leaky diglossic relationship (Ferguson 1959, Wolfram 1986) as the Low variety with Standard English (StdE) as the High variety (Richards 1977, 1983; Gupta 1989, 1994). Some scholars (such as Platt and Weber 1980) have described English in Singapore as a lectal continuum (discussions of the issues involved in the alternative approaches can be found in Gupta 1998, Alsagoff and Ho 1998). Children acquiring English as a native language in Singapore (as the majority of children now do) usually learn Singlish before they learn StdE. Singaporean native speakers of English normally add StdE after the initial experience of language learning, as their parents use StdE in more pedagogical contexts (including when reading aloud) and develop it more fully when they experience formal education (Gupta 1994). In most conversations in which Singlish occurs, there is admixture with StdE (as in Text 2 below). A further complication is that English in Singapore operates in an environment of extraordinary individual and societal multilingualism, where almost everyone uses more than one language on a daily basis, and almost no-one under forty is now a native speaker of only one language. As a corollary, there is a varied adstrate to Singlish and the linguistic and social complexity promotes socially varied and exciting forms of code-mixing and exploitation of language resources.

The contact variety is popularly known as *Singlish*. However, among linguists (such as Ler, this volume) the terms *Singapore Colloquial English* (SCE) or *Colloquial Singapore English* (CSE) are usually used (following Gupta 1989). This

discrepancy between popular and scholarly usage has arisen because those of us studying the grammar of Singlish have been concerned to distinguish the highly informal English used by fluent speakers from superficially similar varieties used by learners of English. The term *Singlish* is popularly used for both varieties. This terminological mismatch is becoming harder to sustain in the face of increasing use of and knowledge of the term *Singlish*. The profile of Singlish has ironically become more prominent since 1999, when the Singapore government embarked on “a planned and determined attempt to root out Singlish before it takes a complete hold of the speech community” (Rubdy 2000: 350). In this paper I use the term *Singlish*, but it should be borne in mind that I am referring to Singlish as used by proficient (and in most cases, native) speakers of it.

I have developed a criterial count to allow quantification of the extent to which a text is focused on Singlish or on StdE (Gupta 1991). One of the criterial features of Singlish is the presence of any of a set of discourse particles, which are single syllable words, mostly loans from Cantonese and Hokkien. The same particles are widely used in informal varieties of other languages in Singapore (including Malay and Mandarin). Tay (1988:135) discusses how lexical items such as these, which are used across colloquial varieties of discrete languages, are part of a Singaporean core vocabulary and common grammatical system. This cross-linguistic core enables multilingual speakers to draw on a shared linguistic knowledge regardless of the language(s) being spoken. I have discussed the social context of Singapore English, and the pragmatic particles in it elsewhere (e.g. Gupta 1992, 1994). In this paper I focus on the theoretical underpinnings and implications of my approach to discourse particles.

1. Theoretical framework

Givón (1993 I:1) writes from a perspective that is “unabashedly functional”. He recognises meta-communicative functions of language, especially socio-cultural, inter-personal affective, and aesthetic, in all of which grammar partakes (I:21).

Even in his analysis of how grammar functions within the communicative core, he identifies functional realms and systems of various sorts. Words have ‘meaning’ in several senses, while grammar (equated with syntax) codes the ‘functional realms’ of ‘propositional information’ and ‘discourse coherence’ (I:25).

Unlike most of those who have studied discourse markers, Givón does not deal with attested data, and does not discuss the dialogic genres with which discourse markers are most closely associated. However, his general model provides the framework for mine and can usefully be extended. Discourse markers of all sorts are associated with dialogue (especially spoken dialogue) and are rare in formal texts of any kind. The prototypical place for their use is unscripted conversation, and the more informal the conversation, the more discourse markers are used. As has often been pointed out, “[t]he spoken language has ... been largely under-described and under-theorised within linguistic science” (Carter 2003:6). Work on discourse markers is at the cutting edge of both description and theorisation of spoken language, and we have not yet learn the appropriate level of abstraction for the analysis of speech.

One of the functions discussed at several points by Givón is modality.

The propositional modality associated with a clause may be likened to a shell that encases it but does not tamper with the kernel inside. The **propositional frame** of clauses ... as well as the actual lexical items that fill the various slots in the frame, remain largely unaffected by the modality wrapped around it. Rather, the modality codes the **speaker's attitude** toward the proposition.

(Givón 1993 I:169)

The two attitudes primarily conveyed are “epistemic judgements of truth, probability, certainty, belief or evidence” and “evaluative judgements of desirability, preference, intent, ability, obligation or manipulation.” In Standard English these judgements are encoded in a range of forms. Epistemic modality may be encoded in the verb (e.g. *He may be on time; He will be on time*) or by adverbs or adverbial connectives (e.g. *He'll probably be on time, He'll definitely be on time; Certainly, he'll be on time*) or by clauses (e.g. *The fact is that he'll be on time; I reckon he'll be on time; I think that he'll be on time; He'll be on time, you know; He'll be on time, I don't think*). Some (but not all) of the adverbials and the clauses that encode propositional modality can be classed as discourse markers by my definition, but not the encoding in the verb, which is syntactically different. Discourse markers are not isomorphous with any functional or any syntactic category. The marking of epistemic modality may not affect the truth value of the propositional content, but it does mark the speaker's assessment of the validity of the propositional content. The relationship of epistemic modality to truth value is therefore complex (Saeed 2003:322ff).

Some languages have a dedicated word class of discourse particles, and in such languages (as can be seen in many of the papers in Wierzbicka (ed.) 1986) these particles seem highly likely to be associated with the continuum of epistemic modality. In these languages (which include all varieties of Chinese, see Dobson 1974:65f), a discourse particle (often also called a *pragmatic particle*) is a single morpheme which conveys to interlocutors aspects of the pragmatic force of the utterance (note that Yang's paper, this volume, uses a wider definition of particle, and does not discuss what I call 'particles').

Traditional Chinese grammar groups words into two classes, one of which (*shící*, or 'concrete words') has referential meaning, and the other of which (*xūcí*, or 'empty words') does not. A subclass of *xūcí* are *zhùcí* ('helping words'), one group of which are the *yǔqí* ('tone-of-voice words') – these *yǔqí* are what I call discourse particles (see, for example *Concise Chinese English Dictionary* 1982:11ff). A discourse particle is not bonded to any particular syntactic element, but is attached to (in Chinese as in Singlish, it is *after*) a sentence, clause, or (less commonly) to a smaller constituent whose force it determines. I will refer to the unit modified as the 'scope' of the particle. A discourse particle does not have any semantically related homonyms in any other word class. In languages with many discourse particles, there may be some disagreement about the number of discourse particles. Cantonese, for example, has many more particles than Singlish, including segmentally homophonous particles distinguished by tone (see, for example, Matthews and Yip 1994:340).

Tsuchihashi (1983) builds on concepts from Givón to account for the particles of Japanese in terms of a system of epistemic modality. Han (1987, 1991), using a slightly different terminology, reconciles the apparently disparate ‘meanings’ of the Mandarin particle *ba* in terms of its “weakening the ‘I-say-so’ neustic, resulting in a qualified ‘I-say-so’, namely ‘I think so’” (Han 1991:3). I argued (Gupta 1992) that, like the particles of Japanese, the discourse particles of Singlish can be ranged on a scale of assertiveness. Mathews and Yip (1994) group the particles of Chinese into *question particles*, *assertive particles*, *imperative and persuasive particles*, *epistemic particles*, and *exclamatory and affective particles*. The particle system of Cantonese is more complex than that of Singlish, so a more sophisticated analysis is needed for Cantonese. However, I feel that even in Cantonese, a wider application of the epistemic framework would help to explain the patterns of usage (*assertive particles* clearly belong in the epistemic range).

Discourse markers can be utterance initial, medial, or final, with some permitted in all positions (e.g. *you know*), and others being, on the whole, restricted to initial or final position (e.g. *Well*, versus *isn't it*). Cross-linguistically, in those languages which have a discourse particle word class, discourse particles are unlikely to be initial, and are likely to mark speaker’s attitude. Of course, a definition which limited discourse markers to classes akin to the discourse particles of languages like Cantonese would be unhelpfully limiting. Discourse markers (and, in those languages which have them, discourse particles too) should not be defined in such a way as to limit them to any position in relation to utterance or clause.

Studies of discourse markers appear to fall into two groups: those on non-European languages which have focused on the post-clausal slot (e.g. Kwok 1984, Luke 1990, Han 1987 and 1991, many of the papers in Wierzbicka (ed) 1986), and those (many of them on English and German) which have focused on the pre-clausal slot (e.g. Schiffrin 1987, Fisher 1998, Jucker and Ziv (eds) 1998). Those discourse markers concerned with the management of conversation tend to be utterance-initial (Schiffrin 1987:328; Jucker and Ziv 1998:3; Carter 2003:10; Biber et al 1999: 1074, 1086; Fraser, this volume). Biber et al's definitions (1999:140, 1046, 1080f) of **discourse markers**, **inserts** and **tags** are cautious but do make a distinction between those associated with **discourse management** and those associated with the marking of **stance** (where 'stance' is similar to Givón's 'speaker's attitude'). If we apply Givón's concept of a functional system onto Biber et al's analysis of the English **tags** (utterance-final discourse markers), we can see that the 'tags' of English also tend to be associated with epistemic modality.

There would seem to be two canonical syntactic slots, cross-linguistically, for discourse markers: pre-clausal (often utterance initial) and post-clausal (often utterance final). In both slots, discourse markers serve two major functional systems: discourse management, and the marking of speaker's attitude. But the post-clausal slot appears to be especially associated with the marking of speaker's attitude, and perhaps especially with the marking of epistemic modality. Other forms functioning to manage discourse include intonation, tempo, and eye contact. Verb forms, adverbials and intonation are the other main forms to express epistemic modality.

I have referred to ‘pre-clausal’ and ‘post-clausal’ discourse markers. Discourse particles are still sometimes referred to as ‘utterance particles’ (Luke 1990) or ‘sentence final particles’ (e.g. Li and Thompson 1981, Matthew and Yip 1994). Han (1991:14) makes clear that the term ‘sentence-final’ allows for particles which are ‘clause-final’. Although most discourse particles in Chinese and in Singlish are clause final, the scope of a particle may sometimes be a structural unit below the level of a clause, so it would strictly speaking be better to refer to them as ‘post-constituent’ than ‘post-clausal’.

Slobin (1985:16) recognised the importance of these particles, in languages in which they were an identifiable word class, as giving “evidence for children’s early attention to functions that may not be clearly discernible in the development of other languages”. They are learnt very early, and appear in the earliest two word sentences (for example, Clancy 1985, Qiu 1985, Schieffelin 1985, Gupta 1994). In this they contrast with some other discourse markers (including most of the StDE ones), which are acquisitionally late (Wells 1985:266). Their early, and error-free acquisition is related to children’s facility with the pragmatic. It may be that the fact of their early acquisition is linked to our difficulties in analysing them (see also Ler, this volume). Another complex feature of language which is acquired early, intonation, has been similarly resistant to analysis. Features acquired early are also often hard for non-native speakers to acquire, and, indeed, discourse particles, and all discourse markers, tend to be taught late, or not at all, to learners, a lack some learners feel, especially given the contribution given by discourse markers to naturalness and warmth (Weydt, this volume).

Discourse markers may be multifunctional (Jucker and Ziv 1998:4). For example, in Standard English a post-clausal discourse marker in utterance final position may simultaneously signal epistemic modality and the end of a turn. Although tracking down the meanings of discourse markers is a challenge, I feel that we should not automatically accept multifunctionality, or polysemy, but that we should begin with a search for a unique meaning or function for each particle that might link apparent multifunctionality. Analysis in terms of functional systems, such as epistemic modality, seems to help in elucidating the way in which a consistently meaningful particle can interact with syntax and context to produce meaningful utterances.

Castell analysed spoken data from adolescent males in London, dense with discourse markers, many of them linked to epistemic modality. The discourse markers *you know* and the much more common *you know what I mean* (Castell 2000:52) occurred in both utterance initial and (more often) utterance final position, and even in clause medial position:

I buy loads of you know records that I like

It was not always possible to link the discourse markers to a single clause over which they had scope, as in this extraordinary example (Castell 2000:58):

it's just a really good rock and roll night you know what I mean, it's sort of like you know like you know trash trashy sex drugs and rock and roll and you know what I mean it's fantastic.

Castell argues that the discourse markers “allow... the speaker to waver between metalinguistic and metacommunicative focus”, distancing the speaker from the authorship of the proposition, and allowing the hearer to share the creation of the meaning, and to decide whether or not to accept whether the terms chosen to

describe the event are appropriate. She offers an analysis of natural conversation in which discourse markers are used with great sophistication, and illustrates how difficult it is to establish the functions of these markers in StdE.

Some of the discourse markers of StdE which convey epistemic modality are attached to a constituent, and may occupy the same post-unit slot as the discourse particles of Singlish (e.g. *you know, right, okay, like*, tag questions). However, these StdE discourse markers do not form a specific word class for the following reasons:

- (1) they are not single morphemes or words -- some are phrases or clauses;
- (2) they are composed of words or phrases which are not restricted to discourse marker use (in itself this would not prevent their being a word class – *dance* can be either a noun or a verb);
- (3) even as discourse markers, they are not restricted to any syntactic slot, but (except for tag questions) may occur in pre-clausal and mid-clausal positions too.

Although many do call these *discourse particles* (e.g. Fischer 1998), I prefer to restrict the term *discourse particle* to single morphemes belonging to a specific word class, and I would exclude from that word class expressions which serve the same functions but which may be single words with semantically related homophones in other word classes (e.g. *right, okay, like*) or which may consist (like *you know* and *is it*) of a clause. To treat these discourse markers as a single word class would be problematic (could *you know* be simultaneously a discourse particle and a pronoun+verb?). Some of the confusions in the multiple definitions of *discourse marker* (discussed throughout Jucker and Ziv (ed) 1998) can be obviated

if we make a clearer separation between the functional and the formal in order to allow us to distinguish between a very diffuse set of discourse markers, which fill the constituent slot of discourse marker, and a much smaller set of discourse particles, relevant to some languages only, which are definable *syntactically* as a word class.

2. Singlish discourse particles

2.1. Form

SCE has a well developed system of discourse particles, with at least eight in common use across ethnic groups (Table 1). The scale ranks them according to the strength with which they can assert the speaker's commitment to the truth value utterance: it should be noted that none mark *opposition* to the truth value (a language which had such particles would need an extended scale, to include the negative assertion of counterfactuality). In speech, the most commonly used particles are *ah* and *lah* (in that order: in written Singlish *lah* is the commoner), and the three particles on the top line are overwhelmingly the most frequently used in each category of assertion, by all speakers of Singlish (see also Ler's Table 1, this volume).

Some have suggested that Singlish particles have lexical tone, as particles do in the Chinese substrate (Bell and Peng 1983, Kwan-Terry 1978, Loke and Low 1988, Tay 1988, Wong 2004). Recent studies of intonation in Singapore English (e.g. Deterding 1994, Goh 2000) support the alternative view (Gupta 1992), that the

particle, especially when sentence final, functions as the carrier of the intonation contour of the utterance. The intonation contour also relates to the force of the particle, whose meaning it interacts with. Platt (1987) is non-committal on this point. It may be that there is variation linked to language repertoire. Those who have a language repertoire devoid of tonal languages (many of the non-Chinese population) may be less likely to have lexical tone in Singlish than those who speak at least one variety of Chinese (most of the ethnic Chinese population). There may be similar dialectal patterns in the treatment of other loan words from varieties of Chinese. The question of whether there is lexical tone in Singlish impacts upon notions of typology, phonology, lexis, code-switching, and variation.

Lah is the most studied particle: Loke and Low (1988) identify nine tonal variants of *lah*, falling into three major groups; Wong (2004) congruently identifies three variants (plus a rarer fourth); and Kwan-Terry (1978) identifies two. Ler (this volume) and I both follow popular usage in identifying only one. The intonation of discourse markers in general is worth more attention (Schiffrin 1987: 328, Rouchota 1998:119).

+ assertive	-----	- assertive
Contradictory	Assertive	Tentative
what	lah	ah
mah	lor	hah
	meh	hor

Table 1: Major discourse particles of Singlish

Some scholars (such as Tay 1988, Wong 2004) transcribe the particles in a broad phonetic form, sometimes with the tone indicated. In this paper, as in my more

recent work (and like Ler, this volume), I use the conventional orthography, as found in printed works which use Singlish. In the case of the spellings *lor* and *hor*, it needs to be borne in mind that Singapore English is non-rhotic. The orthography is etymologically misleading in the case of *what*, which probably should be spelt *wo* or *woh* in line with its likely Cantonese source (Gupta 1992, Wong 2004 spells it *wut*). The Singlish particle *what* has nothing, etymologically or semantically, to do with a homophonous, stereotypically aristocratic British English discourse marker (*Jolly good show, what?*). The conventional spelling follows a well worn path of creative orthography: in the same tradition Text 3 uses the spelling *mare* for the particle more usually written as *meh*. In a Singapore accent, orthographic *what* would suggest [wɔʔ] and *mare* would suggest [mɛ].

Normally, discourse particles must be attached to a constituent. Prototypically, they are attached to syntactically complete sentences. For example, in this (constructed) conversation let us assume that A and B are eating lobster, but A isn't sure what it is (could it be prawn?). B wants to assert that it is indeed lobster, so decides to use a particle. If B wants to simply assert that it is lobster, *lah* is appropriate, but if B wants to assert this so strongly that B challenges A's proposition that it might not be lobster (implying, in this context, that A is stupid not to realise it's lobster) then *what* is available. *Lah* can be added to an assent marker (*Yah*), though *what*, which challenges, probably cannot.

- (1) A This is lobster ah?
 B Lobster lah.
 OR
 Lobster what!
- (2) A This is lobster ah?
 B Yah lah.

OR

*Yah what!

(3) A This is lobster ah?

B *Lah.

OR

*What!

The particles at the more assertive end of the scale can *never* be used as independent utterances. As might be expected, answers normally show ellipsis, but *lah* and *what* must be added to an answer that would be possible without a particle. The syntactic requirement that particles must follow the constituent of their scope is weakened in the case of the tentative particles. The tentative particles *ah*, *hah* and *hor* are commonly used as free standing utterances, especially as clarification requests ((1) below) and as assents (Boy in (2) below). This is the only example of particles failing to fulfil the syntactic definition of Section 1.

(1) [I have given a boy of 7;8 a gift]

AFG You can open it if you like.

Boy Ah?

AFG You can open it.

Boy I don't know how.

(2) [Mother, and child, aged 2;8)

Mother This is your house ah.

Boy Ah.

The canonical scope of the particle is the sentence. However, some particles (and especially those of the tentative group) appear mid-sentence, usually post-clausal. These have been identified as 'punctuating' (Gupta 1992) or as marking the topic (Tay 1988, Low & Deterding 2003:62f). I linked even these particles to the marking of epistemic modality, on the grounds that mid-sentence a tentative

particle “functions to keep the interlocutors in contact”, but Low & Deterding (2003:63) argue that these ‘audible commas’, which follow a topic or a subordinate clause, are ‘non-emotive’ particles with a purely syntactic role.

2.2 . *Function & meaning*

When the particles were first discussed, some scholars treated them as though they had no meaning, identifying them as purely code markers (e.g. Richards and Tay 1977, Platt and Weber 1980:76f, Lim 1986:213, see Ler’s discussion, this volume). Others focused on their pragmatic meaning within the code (e.g. Killingley 1972, Kwan-Terry 1978, Loke and Low 1988, Baskaran 1988:343f, Bell and Peng 1983, Smith 1985, Platt 1987). My paper (1992) was the first (and to date only, I believe) attempt to look at them as a system. Most of those who have written on the particles have also considered their etymology, although not necessarily coming to the same conclusions.

Wong (2004) criticises the “functionalist approach” to particles, arguing that those of us who have used it have confused function with meaning. To me it seems that a clear demarcation of function and meaning is difficult to achieve, and I do not understand what Wong would consider to be ‘function’. Wong’s meanings, worded in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage framework, are cumbersome, do not relate to syntax, and make reference to context without specifying how the context is established linguistically or non-linguistically. This is his meaning of the particle I describe as maximally assertive, *what* (which he spells *wut*):

- (1) something happened now
- (2) because of this, I think you think something
- (3) I say: you can't think like this
- (4) I can say why you can't think like this
- (5) I say it now

(Wong 2004:778)

Low and Deterding (2003:60), referring to an earlier version of Wong's work, see his semantic framework as similar to my scale of assertiveness, and to me also it seems that his paraphrases are alternative wordings of epistemic modality. As is well known (there is a full discussion in Saeed 2003), levels of analysis of language are not fully autonomous, and the way in which scholars manipulate the modularity of language varies. We all have to come to grips in our own ways with the interaction of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics that is entailed in discourse markers of all types. Theoretical variation is a healthy sign of this engagement.

In a situation of diglossia the choice of the H or L code has social meaning, which is more complex in situations of leaky diglossia, such as Singapore English, where the choice of the H variety, Standard English, is more possible than is the choice of L in classic diglossia. Some writers have emphasised the role of particles as markers of L, which is why Richards and Tay (1977) associate the use of *lah* with expressions of 'solidarity'.

Richards and Tay certainly knew that the particles had a meaning beyond their status as code markers, even though they did not mention it, but Platt and Weber, who quoted them (1980: 76f) may not have understood the meaning of the particles within the code. Tay (1988:135f), in the body of her paper, discusses only how the particles function "to establish rapport". She refers to their meaning only in the

annotated appendix, where particles are sporadically explained on an utterance by utterance basis. As Platt and Weber's book has been highly influential, those who have quoted it have sometimes assumed that the particles are merely code-markers, and therefore meaningless apart from their solidarity function.

Low and Deterding (2003:65) go rather too far in the opposite direction. Their data is drawn from fairly formal interviews of 45 Singaporeans by a British male. Only 28 particles were used (18 *ah*, 10 *lah*): this low rate is to be expected in relatively formal speech. Low and Deterding (2003: 65) claim that in this data

the particles do not establish solidarity, because the interviewer, as a British speaker, never uses such particles. In terms of accommodation theory (...), the use of particles here serves to increase the social distance between the participants in the conversation rather than to create social convergence.

This represents a false equation of solidarity with a rather narrow definition of accommodation based on mutual feature convergence. If speakers are accustomed to using linguistic features to mark informal codes, then they will use them to signal informality to any interlocutor with whom they relax or to whom they want to signal relaxation. It was this shift to an informal gear that Richards and Tay were identifying as solidarity.

Solidarity is not the same as friendliness – the particles can be used in violent dispute just as much as in pleasant chat. Nor is it the same as convergence. Just as the use of a T form can signal friendliness or insult, depending on the social context of the choice (Brown and Gilman 1960), so the effect of the use of an L code will

vary depending on the normal expectations for the context of use of L and H. The term ‘solidarity’ might be appropriate for the dominant use of Singlish, but the social meaning of the use of an L code is more complex than what is immediately suggested by ‘solidarity’.

Curiously, at least two novelists from outside the region (Ian Stewart and Amitav Ghosh), using *lah* as a stereotype of Singaporean and/or Malaysian English, have misinterpreted the meaning of the most frequently used assertive particle *lah*, both identifying it as an ‘interrogative’ (i.e. in my terms, as a tentative particle), as in this example from Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* (p498):

... his speaking voice came as a true surprise. He sounded nothing like Rajkumar, in either English or Hindustani. His English was distinctively Malaysian – soft, peppered with floating interrogatives – *la?* – a very engaging, congenial manner of speech.

This is an entirely erroneous interpretation of the meaning of *lah*, which may well reflect a widespread outsider stereotype of *lah* that correctly identifies it as being a salient particle of Singaporean (and Malaysian) English. But while the code marking function is clear to these observers, the meaning remains elusive.

A cartoon by Miel in *An Essential Guide to Singlish* (Singapore: Gart Books, 2004, p54), which asserts the support of Singaporeans for Singlish, in the face of official opposition to it, can be used illustrate how Singlish can be translated to StdE. Eight people, representing an ethnic and gender cross section of Singapore, are on an escalator. The man at the top of the escalator has turned to face those riding up it, and says, “SINGLISH LAH!” The eight responses are glossed:

CAN AH	CAN YOU OR CAN'T YOU? YES OR NO
CAN LAH	YES
CAN LEH	OF COURSE
CAN LOR	I THINK SO
CAN HAH	ARE YOU SURE?
CAN HOR	YOU ARE SURE THEN?
CAN MEH	ARE YOU CERTAIN?

This is not the same inventory as mine, and not ranked by assertiveness, but it does illustrate a popular recognition of the scale of commitment to a proposition that is implied in epistemic modality. There is no sense here that the particles serve only to mark a code!

2.3 Sentence type and speech act

Because assertion is usually linked with statements, and tentativeness with questions, some of those who have written on particles have seen them as marking sentence type. The pioneering paper by Killingley (1972) linked *ah* to interrogatives and *lah* to imperatives. Tay (1988:128) describes *ah* as a 'question particle'. This is also one of the traditional ways of explaining particles in Chinese. Mathews and Yip (1994:65) link the marking of speech act to the marking of stance:

The rich set of [sentence] particles ...which occur primarily at the end of a sentence are one of the most distinctive features of Cantonese.

They serve to indicate speech-act types such as questions and requests, attitudinal factors and emotional colouring. These have no direct counterpart in English, although comparable in function to question tags such as *right?* and *do you?* In theoretical frameworks it has been argued that the particles belong to the category COMP.

Han (1987, 1991) illustrates the interaction of sentence type and particle in Mandarin. Ler's Table 2 (this volume), links the distribution of Singapore Colloquial English particles with sentence type. To look at these distributions is essential, though not entirely unproblematic.

To understand what is going on between particle and sentence type it is vital to separate the syntactic from the functional (or speech act) category of sentence type, as I have argued elsewhere (Gupta 1994), which is not done by many of the others who have made such a link. In Ler's Table 2 (this volume), the first two columns, 'declarative' and 'imperative', seem to be syntactic categorizations, while the three subsequent ones ('questions' of various sorts) are functional speech act categories. There is no 'interrogative' column. The syntax of sentence type needs more definition before distributions can be understood. I have many attested examples of *hah* with declaratives (such as "You go to school hah?", Gupta 1992), but this analysis is predicated on my definition of the syntactic features of interrogatives -- others may wish to argue that the presence of a *hah* particle creates an interrogative, which would remove it from the discourse particle class and put it in the realm of syntax. Such a solution would prevent the identification of a consistent meaning for the discourse particles.

A wh-interrogative with an assertive particle is unlikely to be a question. An utterance such as *Why you do that lah?* is likely to be a directive (*Stop doing it*) or a rebuke (*It was wrong of you to do that*), rather than a question: a contingent answer (such as *Because I like it*) would be regarded as insolent.

In my previous paper on the particles (Gupta 1992) I cited the following example:

[A boy (aged 2;9) and his mother have been looking at a picture book. The mother begins to ask the child to point out something in the book to me (referred to as 'Aunty'). As she begins to speak, the workmen renovating the adjoining house hammer at the dividing wall, frightening the child.]

- | | | |
|---|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Mother | Okay, tell Aunty what you- |
| 2 | Boy | Scare-scare. |
| 3 | Mother | Scared, why you scared lor? |

[Boy calmly turns to the picture of the newspaper in the picture book, to which he has been attracted throughout the session]

Here the assertive particle *lor* expressly marks the interrogative (*Why you scared*) as not being a question. Instead the mother's response becomes an assertion of the unreasonableness of the proposition (*You are scared*). "Why you scared lor?" functions to assert that there is no cause for fear.

Wh-interrogatives are easy enough to define, but I am less clear how to define an imperative in Singlish, given that PRO-drop is so common. However, my data included two examples (both from adults) of *nah* in sentences that might be classed as imperative (both were, in context, undoubtedly directives):

- (1) I don't want to sing. You sing na.
- (2) House put high na.

In these examples the assertive particle is congruent with the directive/imperative, and reinforces it: assertive particles regularly mark directives. But a tentative particle attached to a imperative will lead to a softened directive. I am not clear if some of my examples are counter examples to Ler's distributional list (Table 2, this volume). She indicates that *lah* can, and *lor* cannot, occur in wh-questions. In my

view *lah* and *lor* are unlikely to occur in any kind of question, but both certainly do occur in wh-interrogatives, where I have many attestations.

The way in which text is punctuated can be confusing. In Text 3 the wolf says “U no let me in mare? U dare mare?” These two sentences are declaratives, marked with the assertive *meh* particle. The punctuation with a question mark is in line with the use of interrogatives, and of rising intonation, in Singlish, as in Standard English, to encode a speech act of a type that Givón (1993:II:243) refers to as a *challenge* -- Ler also refers to *meh* in terms of challenge. It is more helpful to think of questions as speech acts which require contingent verbal information as a response.

An epistemic modality analysis shows its strengths in the analysis of Singlish when we deal with the interaction of particle and (syntactic) sentence type : we need a rigid separation of (syntactic) sentence type and (functional) speech act. When a particle is attached to a non-congruent sentence type we can see the effect clearly -- it changes the speech act from that prototypically linked with the sentence type, to a speech act congruent with the particle's meaning, as most commonly happens when assertive particles are added to interrogatives, which do not then function as questions.

3. Examples

The texts at the end of this paper give some idea of how these particles function in discourse. The commonest particles, *ah* and *lah*, dominate all the extracts, and overtly mark the cooperative nature of the discourses (Texts 1 and 2).

In Text 1 an adult and a child joke about the child's father's state-of-the-art bicycle. In this fast moving, and very Singlish conversation, the adult and child function as equal, collaborative partners. The tentative particles *ah* (9, 12,13) and *hah* (10) are used to pinpoint the shared agreement between the speakers. All are post-clausal, and all but one (13) are utterance final. The *ah* of line 13 is an example of the more syntactic use of a particle, here after a subordinate clause.

Text 2 is only one half of a telephone conversation with a stranger. In this text the speaker uses a great deal of StdE, including some StdE discourse markers (*you know, you see*). She introduces Singlish as the conversation continues, perhaps in an effort at solidarity, to counter her refusal of the interlocutor's requests. The assertive *lah* is more visible here (6, 17, 28), as the speaker convinces her interlocutor of the need for her not being willing to give a firm answer on the house purchase, while *ah* is used twice in checks (21a, 22), twice in interrogatives functioning as questions (20, 21b), and once to soften a declarative which is part of an explanation for her non-compliance with what the caller would prefer (17). Six of the particles are clause final, and the two which are not (21b, 28) are placed after another discourse marker (*And then, OK*).

Text 3 is from a comic text, a retelling of the story of the Three Little Pigs in Singlish. Their names, some of the variant spellings (e.g. *apron, lush*) and some of the lexical items used (e.g. *jia lat*, 'troublesome', a word of Hokkien etymology) indicate to the reader that The Three Little Pigs are not only ethnic Chinese, but from a social group identified as working class and Chinese-, rather than English-,

oriented. . However, most of the lexical items are general in Singlish (e.g. the passive marker *kanna*, more usually spelt *kena*, which has a Malay etymology), rather than being ethnically marked. The discourse particles, *lah*, *lor*, and *mare* (= *meh*), are used only in dialogue, and when the reader is addressed. All are clause final (including ‘Same lah’ – this is a clause). In speech, *ah* is the most common particle, but it is not used here at all, once again illustrating that the tentative particles are perhaps doing jobs other than plain marking of epistemic modality. Like Text 2 this text also uses a number of Standard English discourse markers (*you know*, *okay*, *right*, *man*). These tags also relate to epistemic modality, and the way in which they interact with the more self-contained word class of particles which are loanwords from varieties of Chinese is something which deserves further examination.

Text 4 shows how an assertive particle (*lor*) can assert an acceptance of another person’s point of view. This is where we need to understand, as discussed by Ler (this volume) the importance of understanding how listeners need to interpret the context of the particle. There has been a potentially difficult discussion about Christianity, and ‘stary stary night’ has (in StdE) accused ‘Denzig’ of misunderstanding. Denzig backs down and apologises, in Singlish. The assertive particle adds force to the ‘OK’ of Denzig’s retraction, but also signals the switch to Singlish. This switch to Singlish is motivated by solidarity – it was this kind of behaviour that led some of the earlier writers to focus on the particles purely as solidarity markers. Like Text 2, this illustrates how the discourse particles are simultaneously code markers and epistemic modality markers. But it is the switch to L that signals solidarity -- the particle is used as a meaningful part of the L code.

4. Social context

These particles function in a complex linguistic ecology. We need to know much more about the sociolinguistic variation in the use of the particles. Platt (1987:395) asserts (wrongly, in my view) that many of the particles that I have discussed are restricted to “ethnically Chinese basilectal”. Tay (1988:136) claims that some particles (including *lor*, *leh* and *meh*) would only be used among interlocutors who “speak or understand some dialect of Chinese”. It is not clear how much knowledge of Chinese Tay had in mind: although in younger age groups knowledge of cross-ethnic languages is becoming less common, it is usual for non-Chinese Singaporeans born before the 1970s to have some basic knowledge of Hokkien, which was once a widespread lingua franca. I have certainly heard non-Chinese Singaporeans use all the particles identified by Platt and by Tay as being restricted to members of the Chinese community or to speakers of Chinese. However, the distribution of repertoire may vary according to ethnic, linguistic, educational, and social background, and this needs to be established. Some particles may indeed be used primarily by those of Chinese ethnicity. Singlish speakers of particular varieties of Chinese may also be able to use additional particles from a given variety of Chinese. Some particles of particular Chinese varieties may be available for a bilingual speaker to use when speaking to the same kind of bilingual. Knowledge of the source language may also affect how a speaker uses an individual particle, in terms of both function and phonology.

The discourse particles have permeated all the languages of Singapore (and Malaysia and Brunei), including the unrelated languages: Mandarin, Malay, and English. What social and linguistic imperatives have led to this? Wong (2004:784ff) attributes their borrowing to pervasive “Asian values”, an ill-defined concept I find deeply problematic and worrying. That they are areal features is a sign of their great discursal importance. Matras (1998:282) argues that the reason discourse markers are “at the very top of the borrowability hierarchy in situations of conventional, interactional language contact is conditioned by their cognitive properties, that is by the mental processing operations they trigger as part of their inherent function”. His examples are drawn from contact situations where what he calls the “pragmatically dominant” language is one towards which speakers’ “efforts at norm-conforming linguistic behavior are currently directed” (1998:326). The discourse particles of Singapore, in contrast, come from the varieties least liable to “norm-conforming linguistic behaviour”, and are found across languages in the less formal contexts of use.

Work on Hong Kong English is less developed than is work in Singapore English, and the use of Cantonese particles in the English of Hong Kong has been little mentioned, but Bolton (2002:49ff.) presents a fascinating online conversation, in which two young people use informal on-line chat style with inserted Cantonese lexical items, and pragmatic particles from Chinese, which they spell inconsistently. This text, which is lightly annotated, cries out for a real discussion -- are discourse particles used in Hong Kong English as they are in Singlish?

Singlish is a national marker of Singapore identity (much to the distress of the Singapore government). There are also likely be ethnically based patterns of use of the Singlish particles, which can be used as a marker of identity at intranational level. Markers of identity are also manipulated in cross ethnic conversations for solidarity across ethnicities and in playfulness (similar behaviour in the UK is attested in Rampton 1995). We need more analysis of natural conversational data to establish sociolinguistics complexities of this sort.

It is not only in Singlish that discourse markers may become stereotypical markers of a group, exploited in fiction and humour. Schifffrin referred to *you know* and *I mean* as 'stigmatised' (1987:311), which seems too strong a word for something that all English speakers say. However, the traditional link between grammar and the written word is such that the grammar of conversation may be misunderstood in a way that is close to stigmatisation. Particular discourse markers may be linked with particular groups, some of whom may be stigmatised. The StdE discourse marker *like* has been sometimes identified as part of youth culture, and *what* as a discourse marker has been used in literature to signal the speech of the British upper class. We have seen how the particle *lah* has been taken up as a stereotype of Singapore and Malaysian English (and sometimes used wrongly). Within Singapore, some particles (including *lor*) appear to be used in fiction and humour to signal a speaker of Chinese ethnicity and cultural focus, and another assertive particle, *dah*, is associated especially with the Singlish of speakers of Indian ethnicity, often appearing in literary treatments to give a linguistic identification to Indians.

The use of discourse particle is often the first sign that a speaker is switching from H to L. The particles have meaning within a variety the use of which has social meaning – the discourse particles are criterial identifiers of Singlish, the Low variety of Singapore English. The repertoire of particles used by an individual speaker may also be linked to ethnicity and language background of both speaker and addressee(s). Within that code, like all discourse markers, the discourse particles of Singlish are a part of the grammar of conversation, something about which we still know little. They are an overt marker of one of the ways in which speakers signal their relationship to truth, and, by so doing, attempt to control the responses of interlocutors. Through their attentiveness to shared context, to pragmatics, and to the overt marking of epistemic modality, the Singlish discourse particles help conversational partners to join together to create a pragmatically rich conversation.

5. Conclusion and prospective

Singlish has a set of discourse particles that allow for a systematic analysis through a framework of epistemic modality. This is not a complete answer for all discourse markers (not even for all discourse particles) in all languages. It might not be the complete answer for Singlish, indeed. While *what*, *lah* and *ah* fit easily on an assertiveness cline, it is difficult to use a single cline to distinguish the meaning of particles at the same point on the scale, and less common particles (such as *meh*, discussed by Ler in this volume) appear to be on the cline, while contributing meanings distinct from each other that I have not been able to capture. However, a crisp separation of the functional and the syntactic is, I believe, of general usefulness, and may allow for the demarcation of sets of structures in other languages and varieties.

Ler's approach (this volume) is different from mine, but perhaps not incompatible.

Her cognitive approach provides a model for understanding how the hearer can interpret the force of a particle in the light of the linguistic meaning of the utterance to which it is attached, and the context of the use. It remains vital to attempt to establish the meaning of the particle itself, and also to be precise about the linguistic context.

There is more to be learned about the discourse particles of Singapore, in particular:

- (a) *issues of intonation*. Do the particles have lexical tone? How do they work intonationally?
- (b) *the scope of the particle*. Can the 'punctuating' particles be usefully placed on the scale of epistemic modality or should they be analysed as purely syntactic?
- (c) *Standard English discourse markers*. The discourse markers which are loanwords from varieties of Chinese form a system relating to epistemic modality. How do the post-clausal discourse markers of English etymology (e.g. *you know, right, okay, man*) fit in to this system?
- (d) *rules for using Singlish*. What are the social rules for switching from StdE to Singlish? Is 'solidarity' a useful concept?
- (e) *cross-speaker comparison*. Does the use of particles vary systematically with the speaker's linguistic repertoire, ethnicity and/or social class?
- (f) *cross-linguistic comparison*. How are discourse particles used in other languages of Singapore, especially in informal varieties of Mandarin Chinese and of Malay?

We are at an early stage of developing terms and concepts that will allow us to have a common analytical understanding of these vital elements in linguistic interaction.

We need to examine actual data. We need to develop techniques of elicitation and

intuition. We need to have a clear and rigorous concept of the distinction between grammar and function. It is vital to approach discourse markers cross-linguistically to help clarify these notions. It is difficult to understand discourse particles even in languages related to Chinese, which has traditionally identified them as a discrete word class. We can expect it to be even harder when we approach languages in which they have only recently been explored.

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Texts

1. *Spoken data, orthographic transcription Highly focused SCE.*

CK -- boy aged 5;11
N -- next door neighbour of CK
SK -- CK's mother

[N is at the door of CK's' house]

- 1 CK Uncle! [kinship terms widely used in address to non-kin in Singapore]
Uncle get me my ball, I got big one for you.
- 2 N Why?
- 3 CK Inside the house.
- 4 N Where's that big bicycle?
- 5 SK Gone.
- 6 CK Big bicycle taken away.
- 7 N Taken away already. [*already* is an aspect marker]
- 8 CK No. Because going Toa Payoh. [*Toa Payoh* -- area of Singapore. Null subject and BE deletion. contextually retrievable subject is *we*]
- 9 N Going Toa Payoh. Oh oh. [null subject. contextually retrievable subject is *you*]
Then bicycle go first ah. [*the* is seldom used. Time reference is past -- *go* has neither tense not agreement. *ah* is a tentative particle, its scope the whole sentence, here indicating this conclusion-- that the bicycle has gone ahead of the group who are going to Toa Payoh]
OK you go with them. [OK is a discourse element, but not a particle]
- 10 CK Don't mind hah. [Contextually retrievable subject is *I*. Tentative particle *hah*]
Know where also. [Contextually retrievable subject is *I*.]
There my gra- my grandmother- my my
My uncle also went. [use of past tense associated with Standard English]
- 11 N Next time you grow up you take over the big one. [Next time is an adverbial associated with future time reference, here used to introduce the dependent adverbial clause of time. The antecedent of *one* is *bicycle*.]
- 12 CK Yeah. [N laughs]
Then my mo- brother take over my one. [base form in *take*]
[CK and N laugh]
Yeah ah. [tentative particle *ah*. *Yeah* signals CK's agreement with N, *ah* solicits N's continued agreement with CK]
- 13 N As soon as he take yours ah, you take your father's one. [base form in *take*, particle *ah* at end of dependent clause, scope is to proposition in dependent clause, identifying it as possibility to be considered]
[N laughs]

2. *Spoken data, orthographic transcription. Leaky diglossia.*

SK is the mother of CK.

[One side of a phone call -- caller is a house agent, a stranger to SK. SK is interested in buying. Each paragraph is a turn -- intervals not shown. There is simultaneous talk between myself and SK's sons, which is silently omitted. This text shows mixing of Singapore Colloquial English and Standard English, in a way typical of many adult discourses.]

- 1 SK Hello.
- 2 Yes. Yes.

- 3 Yeah.
- 4 Yeah, oh. Oh. [*laughs*]
- 5 [inaudible]
- 6 Her price is too high for me lah. [assertive particle *lah*. The particles lah and ah may be used in discourse which is otherwise in Standard English. The statement is thereby emphasised, and a degree of informality is signalled]
- 7 So what is the latest offer now?
- 8 Highest offer.
- 9 The other time I was thinking three hundred. [= \$300,000]
- 10 Oh then I have to consult again, with my husband, you see, but if it's somewhere near the region of three hundred I don't mind. [StdE discourse elements, the pre-clausal *Oh then*, and post-clausal *you see*.]
- 11 [inaudible]
- 12 Ah-ha. In fact that would be the highest I would go you know. [StdE discourse elements, pre-clausal *in fact* and post-clausal *you know*. [*laughs*]
- 13 That's right.
- 14 That is a two room one. Is it two room? [= 2 *bedroomed*]
- 15 It's a semi-d-. I don't know. But are they selling the place?
- 16 [inaudible]
- 17 No you see my husband's not at home lah. That's the problem, ah. [After several turns entirely in Standard English, SK introduces two pragmatic particles, the assertive *lah* emphasising the force of her reason for not committing herself on the house sale, and the tentative *ah* seeking the interlocutor's understanding of the problem]
- 18 Double storey terrace.
- 19 And one bath. Uh-huh.
- 20 Yeah and then how many rooms ah? [here the tentative particle *ah* is added to the *how many* interrogative]
- 21 The first one downstairs ah. And then ah- what's the land area like? [zero copula -- the only other feature of Singapore Colloquial English apart from pragmatic particles that SK uses in this discourse. The first *ah* is marking the check on the answer, a common use of *ah*. The second marks a structural break]
- 22 Oh one eight ah. [= 1800m²] [another check marked by *ah*]
- 23 M.
- 24 How much is he uh asking for?
- 25 M. This one one thousand. Yeah. Yeah. Em I am quite interested y'know. Can I uh [inaudible] [another zero copula]
- 26 Yeah, hold one because my husband is away.
- 27 [inaudible]
- 28 Yeah OK. OK lah, bye bye. [here the *lah* signals the end of the conversation -- a common telephone formula.]

3. Written data – highly focused ‘dialect literature’

The 3 Little Pigs – Singapore version

Ones apron a time got tree little pig, call them Ah Beng, Ah Seng and Ah Tee. They think they big already and no wan to liv with mama, because liv with mama sometimes quite pek chek and also can become suaku! So they say goodbye to their mama and go out of house. Mama tell them to be careful of the big, bad woof, because you know, this big, bad sabo king want to eat them. They tell their mama,

"we know lah, not scared one". We build house so woof cannot get us. If he try, he will be sorry.

The first pig, Ah Beng he think he very clever, he also cannot wait one, very kancheong type you know. So he build a house very quickly. Finish very fast- how? Aiyoh, he use straw lor, just tie and tie and tie together and then very quick okay already.

This woof very clever kay see, so he pretend and say nice things and ask Ah Beng to let him to inside house. Little Ah Beng also quite clever, he say, "No way man, I know you, don't bluff. Sorry you not welcome here".

The woof say "U no let me in mare? U dare mare? I blow your house down then you know". And he blow and blow and he poon and poon and he use all his inside strength and jia lat man, Ah Beng's house come down.

...

Moral of the story :->

Number 1 - do things slow, slow, must plan, think, plan, nowadays they say strategic planning. No lush and lush and chin chai build. Chin chai do things ownself die - never think, how can use straw build house, how can house be strong, sure kanna one lah.

Number 2 - don't be so tum sim. Blow down one house, two house not enough want to blow until all tree. Given people some face, don't be too hao lian! In the end too tum sim also kanna - woof kanna heart attack.
Same lah we all also like that, enough is enough, some people pia until they mati.

Number 3 - those who got must kongsi with those who no got then the world sure better place. Remember : if you have and your neighbor no have, kongsi lah. And those who tumpang must know cannot tumpang too long, or else. But when kongsi right hand must not know what left hand give or else no use lah.
This mean kongsi quietly, don't let whole world know you give okay.
Very chim, right?

(http://members.tripod.com/~wendell_fields/singlish.html) [accessed May2001]

4. *Written dialogue -- newsgroup*

Subject: Re: Christians creating problems in Singapore.

Date: Tue, 9 Jan 2001 20:36:30 -0500

From: "Denzig" <denzig@hotmail.com>

Newsgroups: soc.culture.singapore

References: 1 , 2 , 3 , 4 , 5 , 6 , 7 , 8 , 9

"stary stary night" <namashte@harehare.com> wrote in message
news:3A5C8EB6.7EBF106F@harehare.com...

- > *he,he,he,you do not need to create the 'smoke screen'of so many*
- > *replies for my just one question.what you need to seek, is actually the*
- > *help of an elementary english school teacher.go !and read the previous*
- > *post of exchange between me and madcow all over again.i did not pose*
- > *the question in vacuum.it was in reply to madcow.*
- > *i am just laughing off your attempt for the time being.*

Ok lor.... So I answer wrongly... Nebber mind... sorry...
