

NORDTALK
Using Spoken Language Corpora

LINGUISTIC FEEDBACK IN SINGAPORE ENGLISH

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1. Introduction: A Brief Overview of Singapore English

Singapore is a multiethnic and multilingual country with of 77.8% Chinese, 14.1% Malays, 6.9% Indians and 1.2% others (Singapore Statistics, 2002). Despite a linguistic situation involving a variety of unrelated languages each with its own literary tradition as described by Rustow (1968), today, the English language in Singapore should not be described as a *lingua franca* but rather it has developed since its lingua franca state to what is now a New Variety of English with its specific grammatical structures, lexicon and phonological patterns. The uses of Singapore English, including that of being an official language (including language of education), working language and international language has now come to encompass the Singapore Identity where Singapore English is used by its people to express their point of view of the world.

Because Singapore English is a particular variety of New English, researchers are in a position to observe a highly dynamic situation where a variety of linguistic innovations and changes are being made as Singapore English begins to define its space in its respective society. It is useful to think of Singapore English as having two extreme varieties that include Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). A variety of studies based on the syntax, lexical use and phonology of Singapore English had been done including Platt (1977), Tay (1979), Platt & Weber (1980), Ho, (1992) Pakir (1993), Gupta (1992) and Foley et al. (1998).

In looking at the grammar of Singapore English, SSE is very much alike to any other variety of standard English around the world including that of America, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The differences between SSE and SCE however, are stark. In addition to non-English words used in SCE, there is a difference in the structure of the sentences and idiomatic expressions used. Brown (1991) has also gone into detail about the phonology of Singapore English.

There are two ways in which Singapore English has been described including the *lectal continuum approach* (Platt, 1977) and the *diglossia approach*

(Gupta, 1994). Both approaches acknowledges a variation within Singapore English and that Singapore English can be viewed as a speech continuum. The two frameworks differ in their manner of emphasis of aspect. While the lectal approach views Singapore English as a non-native variety, the diglossia approach views Singapore English as a native variety. The lectal continuum framework describes Singapore English as dependent on the social status and level of education of the speaker. And while Platt and Weber stress that Singapore English is in no manner inferior or substandard, their descriptions of features of the variation in Singapore English, primarily use Standard British English (StdBrE) as comparison. A more detailed description of acrolectal, mesolectal and basilectal features can be found in Tay 1993.

In view of historical reasons and current situational developments of the English language use in Singapore, Platt and Weber's approach may be used to account peripherally for a certain age group of users of English in Singapore. The rapidly changing situation of users of Singapore English (where more people have English as their mother-tongue) points in the direction of a diglossic approach for the future. In the next twenty years (if not already today), younger users of Singapore English will find themselves using Singapore English in expressing their identity as Singaporeans in an international setting of English language users.

2. Linguistic Feedback

While the full potential of linguistic feedback comes from a variety of means including facial expression and gestures, however this paper will look at the content features and basic functions of linguistic feedback of Singapore English where linguistic feedback in this paper is broadly defined in accordance to Allwood et al. (1993) as "linguistic mechanisms which enable the participants of a conversation to exchange information about four basic communicative functions". As such, the four basic dimensions as proposed by Allwood et all (1993) include that of the giving and eliciting of *contact*, *perception*, *understanding* and the giving / eliciting of *attitudinal reactions*. The feedback utterances thus give information along the following:

- (i) contact – the obligation / desire between interlocutors to continue interaction
- (ii) perception – the interlocutors' awareness and discernment of expression and message of the utterance
- (iii) understanding – the interlocutors' comprehension of utterance
- (iv) attitudinal reactions – this includes assent, negation or rejection, tentativity, assertion etc. Other attitudes such as boredom, disbelief, surprise, disappointment and enthusiasm etc also fall under this fifth dimension.

3. Data and Methodology

Data for this study comes from sections S1A and S1B of the *International Corpus of English – the Singapore corpus* (ICE- SIN), that are recorded discussions and telephone conversations. This lends a total of 180 dialogue sessions with each session ranging from forty-five minutes to one and a half hours of recorded time.

In order to study linguistic feedback, a frequency list¹ was extrapolated from the 180 dialogue sessions which rendered 1429 A4 sized pages of data. The study was then limited to the first 150 pages of data (about 10% of the data) for analysis in order to delimit the size and scope of the study. Since not all 150 pages of data consisted of what is defined as linguistic feedback, the fifty most frequently occurring feedback was extrapolated from the 150 pages to render Table 1 in Appendix A, which shows the frequency count of linguistic feedback in Singapore English. The annotation for the ICE corpus is textual markup. ICE texts tagged for wordclass by the TOSCA Tagger, developed at the University of Nijmegen. This assigns wordclass tags to each lexical item in the corpus. The tagset has been developed especially for ICE, and is largely based on Quirk *et al* (1985) *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*.

In order to limit the scope and size of this study, not all possible combinations of linguistic feedback occurring in SCE and SSE will be looked at. However, the following overview of feedback in Singapore English in this study is based on Table 1 in Appendix A.

¹ My appreciation goes out to Magnus Gunnarsson who helped get those statistics in order.

4. Basic Feedback in Singapore Standard English (SSE)

The segment on feedback in Singapore Standard English will be brief as it has similar linguistic feedback as any other standard Englishes around the world (i.e., American English, British English, Canadian English, Australian English etc) with similar pragmatic functions. Table 1 lends some examples of feedback particles that can be found in SSE that correspond to standard Englishes around the world.

Table 1. Examples of Basic Feedback in Singapore Standard English

	Feedback Particles	Meaning of Feedback
Contact (C)	uhm ah ah ha ya then	'yes, I hear you', 'yes, continue' 'I think otherwise', 'I have a different opinion' 'yes, I hear you' 'yes, continue' 'yes, I hear you, continue'
Perception (P)	uhm ya, yah no	'yes, I hear you', 'I understand you' 'I disagree', 'I don't wish/want to'
Understanding (U)	uh huh ya, yah right isn't it	'I understand you' 'is it not so', 'is this not the case'
Attitudinal Reactions (AR)	wow, whoa oh dear but	'fantastic!', 'awesome!' 'I regret that it happened' 'I think otherwise', 'I have a different opinion'

5. Basic Feedback in Singapore Colloquial English (SCE)

5.1 Particles that Signal Rejection in SCE:

- a. *what*
- b. *mah*
- c. *meh.*

As Gupta (1992) noted, the use and functions of the SCE *what* and the *what* in standard English are by far, not the same but is rather calqued from the Cantonese *wo* (Luke, 1990 cited in Gupta 1992). The main function of the particles *what*, *mah* and *meh* serves to feedback a rejection to a previous utterance between the interlocutors.

a. What

What is a feedback giving particle with its main function as the giving of the feedback in terms of an interlocutors showing an understanding of what has been exchanged between the interlocutors. It also gives the AR of a challenge to an opinion previously stated by another interlocutor.

What could possibly be the most common feedback particle in SCE with 2530 instances of occurrence, after *uh*, *ya* and *uhm* (which signal contact and perception, and is used by interlocutors to show an interest in keeping the conversation going). However it must be noted that the frequency count has also taken into account the standard English use of the word *what* in SSE to, including the WH-element in terms of circumstances, theme, deixis and in WH-interrogative constructions.

Example 1 shows the use of *what* by speaker B to firstly show speaker A that speaker B understands what speaker A is proposing, that one needs to plan in advance, and secondly speaker B shows that he/she does not agree with speaker A's proposal and therefore uses the particle *what* not only as a rejection to what speaker A has proposed in line #66 but to challenge the proposal. In saying so and using the particle *what* in line #68, speaker B does not expect speaker A to come back with the same proposal because speaker B then goes on to explain in line #69 the reason for the rejection of the proposal by speaker A. When speaker B uses the particle *what* in line #68, he/she is also indicating that the reason for the rejection (line #69) should also be an obvious reason for speaker A and should therefore be a non-issue for both interlocutors.

Example 1. ICE-SIN: S1A-007

Context: Buying Flowers

<\$B>

#64 I don't know whether to go I need to go to my mum's but no
flowers

<\$A>

#65 You should have

#66: You want to go you never plan in advance one *nuh* [declarative stating opinion,
emphasised by the use of *nuh*]

<\$B>

#67 But flowers you buy too early [contradiction signalled by *but*]

#68 It's useless *what* [giving of feedback; challenge to opinion in #66]

#69 It will it will die off

[obvious fact that speaker B thinks A should know]

This aspect of ‘stating what is obvious’ by the use of the particle *what* in terms of feedback giving, is not captured if the particle is absent from line #68. Instead, lines #68 and #69 will read as a declarative, i.e. *It’s useless, it will die off*. And such a declarative also indicates that speaker B agrees with speaker A’s proposition in line #66, that one needs to plan in advance.

Example 2 shows how the particle *what* in speaker A’s feedback *ya what*, is used by speaker A to point out, what to speaker A, is an obvious fact. It is also another example of how the particle *what* is used to show that speaker A does not expect someone else to reject the proposal, since whatever facts speaker A is presenting seems to be obvious i.e. yes, it is the case that if nobody else I know is going, why should I go? The second instance of *what* that occurs in the utterance in #101 is the use of the word as one may use it in standard English to mean ‘for what reason’, as in ‘if my aunt and my sister are not going, for *what* reason am I to go?’ The use of the pragmatic particle *hor*, which is has a feedback eliciting function, will be looked at in section 5.3.2.

Example 2. ICE-SIN: S1A-007

Context: Going Over to a Relative’s Place

<\$A>

#101 Ya *what* it's my if my if my aunty if my sister they all don't
go what for I go hor

b. Mah

Mah is an eliciting feedback particle where its main function is to elicit feedback from other interlocutors in terms of understanding what is currently being said. In a sense, it can be said to be equivalent to the question tags of *isn't it*, *don't we*, *didn't he* etc in standard English.

Example 3 has several feedback particles, including that found in lines #234, where *of course of course* indicates speaker B’s understanding and agreeing with what speaker A has said. Speaker B, in line #237 tries to elicit feedback from speaker A by the use of *hor*, a particle which is roughly equivalent to *isn't it* in this context, in addition, *hor* also signals the AR of solidarity between speakers A and B. And in lines #239, the use of the word *mah* can also be translated to approximately mean, *don't we*. The difference between *mah* and *hor* in this context is that *mah*, unlike *hor*, does not seem to capture the

AR of solidarity. So if the particle *mah* were substituted for *hor* in line #237, the utterance would be:

Then Eric say yes I also have to work my kids also got to go to school *mah*
Which in effect has the same meaning, as *isn't it*, but it does not capture and reflect the solidarity between the two speakers as compared to if *hor* is used instead.

Example 3. ICE-SIN: S1A-007

Context: Friend's Coming / Going over for Dinner

#230 I expect them to come on Saturday Sunday

#231 How are you going to talk about sec second day so

#232 So you have to accept

<\$A>

#233 But they are not cannot stay too late leh because the next
day we got to go to work you know

<\$B>

#234 Of course of course [giving feedback: agreement]

#235 That's why I don't mind them coming on the second day because I
said I don't have

#236 uhm I I've to work the next day

#237 Then Eric say yes I also have to work my kids also got to go to
school *hor* [eliciting feedback by use of *hor*]

#238 That's why lah you

#239 That's why we say five o'clock *mah* [eliciting feedback by use of *mah*; approximately
meaning 'don't we' in this instance]

#240 Five o'clock but your consideration is to make sure there's some
food for the kids *lah* [*lah* used to give feedback / indicate a speaker B's
realisation]

<\$A>

#241 Why the adults no need to eat one *meh* [signals contradiction speaker B's utterance in
#240 and signals an interrogative]

#242 Five o'clock *ah* [*ah* to signal confirmation]

c. Meh

Meh is primarily an eliciting feedback particle and it occurs with 17 instances throughout the whole data. An example of its use can be found in Example 3, line #241, where the feedback particle not only signals, what to speaker A, is an obvious fact, but *meh* is also used to signal an interrogative with an attitude of challenging what has been said in the previous utterance. Compare the sentences below:

- a. why the adults no need to eat one? (Standard English: Why do the adults have no need to eat?)
- b. why the adults no need to eat one *meh*? (Standard English: Why, don't adults need to eat too?)

In utterance (a), one can read the usual meaning of the utterance as an interrogative whilst in utterance (b) the particle *meh* implies that what is discussed is an obvious fact and it signals a rhetorical question that implies a rejection of the previous utterance so that it can be used in effect to elicit more feedback from the other interlocutors.

In the context of Example 3, speaker B has set the time for going over to speaker A's place at five o'clock because speaker B assumes that speaker A has considered the meal time for the children. Speaker A however, returns with the feedback in #241 which throws doubt on speaker B's assumptions which was that Speaker A had not considered the adults. Speaker A thus says, *why the adults no need to eat one meh*, to show that speaker A had indeed considered the adults too.

5.2. Particles that Signal Contact, Perception and Understanding:

- a. *can / cannot*
- b. *hà / há*
- c. *is it / or not*
- d. *ah*

a. Can / Cannot

Example 4 has several feedback mechanisms, some of which such as *aiyoh* and *aiyah* that are feedback giving particles indicating despair or dismay, will be discussed in greater detail in section 7.3. The feedback giving particle *ha* which in the context of Example 4 is roughly equivalent to *is that so?* will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Example 4 shows the use of the word *cannot*, where it is used to mean 'no I couldn't get in'. The repetition of the word *cannot* in line #282 from the previous utterance in line #281 also acts as a confirmation of what speaker A has said i.e., that speaker B

could not get into the club. The illustrated details may be found in square brackets to the right hand side of Example 4, lines #278 to #282.

Example 4. ICE-SIN: S1A-014
Context: Gaining Entrance into a Night Club

#276 You know yesterday night I went to this NTUC club
<\$A>
#277 That the karaoke lounge
<\$B>
#278 *Aiyoh* karaoke lounge full house [new information]
#279 *Aiyah* yesterday night
<\$A>
#280 *Ha* [CPU and cheking information status ie. *is that so?*]
#281 So cannot go in uh [repetition as check sequence]
<\$B>
#282 *Cannot* [confirmation, affirmation i.e., *yes I couldn't get in*]
<\$A>
#283 Oh full house they will cut people off uh

Example 5 is another instance of the use of the word *cannot* as the giving of feedback in line #86 to mean 'no, it's not possible'.

Example 5. ICE-SIN: S1A-052

<\$C>
#85 You cannot have it on diskette
<\$B>
#86 *Cannot* [giving feedback, meaning 'no, it's not possible']
#87 *Cannot* fit in floppy floppy disk
<\$C>
#88 *Why* [eliciting feedback]

Apart from the word *cannot*, where in SCE, the confirmation of a previous utterance may simply be a repetition of the word, the word *can* has two different functions in feedback. The first is a confirmation via repetition of the word, similar to how the word *cannot* functions in Example 4. The following use of the word *can* is common:

<A> Can you hand this package to E-lin on the way out?
 Can (takes the package)

The word *can* can also be substituted in Example 5, so that you have the following exchange:

<\$C> You cannot have it on diskette [interrogative]

<\$B> Can, can fit in floppy disk confirmation] [*can* used in the giving of feedback, in this case,

b. Hà / Há

There are 145 instances of this particle in use in the entire data. The main function of the particle *hà* when pronounced with a falling intonation is to check for the information status of the previous utterance with the inherent meaning *is that so? or is that true?* . Example 6 also shows the use of the particle *hà* in feedbacking contact, perception and understanding (CPU) found in line #219 and the checking of the information status of what the previous speaker has said in line #218. In line #218, speaker A has expressed an opinion that perhaps the money is too much. Speaker C then says *ha* in order to check if speaker A really did think that it was too much. Speaker C's check however is not followed up by speaker A thereafter.

Example 6. ICE-SIN: S1A-017 Context: Exchanging Currency

<\$B>
#208 We need for meals and for
<\$C>
#209 So how [eliciting feedback, AR: uncertainty / tentativity]
<\$A>
#210 Ya ya ya [giving of feedback; realisation]
#211 So this is times two then
<\$B>
#212 You can times two again right
#213 Only it's going to be another double of the amount of of
<\$C>
#214 Accommodation
<\$B>
#215 So got paper or not
#216 Write down the
<\$ >
#217 Four
<\$A>
#218 That's a lot [declarative. Stating a point of view]
<\$C>
#219 *Ha* [CPU, i.e. do you really think so?]
#220 Whatever name we <unclear> word </unclear>
<\$B>
#221 Can write behind right [interrogative, i.e. *may I* write at the back of this]

Lines #94 –96 of Example 7 also show the use of the particle in checking the information status of the previous utterance, the sequence of which is illustrated in square brackets to the right. In Example 7, the particle can also be said to signal enthusiasm.

Example 7. ICE-SIN: S1A-009

Context: Discussion on Television Programmes

<A>
#94 'A' tonight is uhm Women's Choice
#95 Must watch I don't know what the
<\$B>
#96 *Ha* [CPU and AR: enthusiasm]
<\$A>
#97 SBC's
<\$B>
#98 Oh I know it's Klute
<\$A>
#99 *Is it* [checking for information status, i.e. speaker A wants a confirmation of #98]
<\$B>
#100 *Ya* [confirmation]

The particle *há* when pronounced with a rising intonation has two functions. The first indicates that the previous utterance was not heard clearly, as such, the next speaker says *há?* Such a use of the particle can be found in the following exchange:

<A> Lisa, telephone call for you
 há?
<A> I said, telephone call for you

The second function of the particle *há* serves to signal surprise and shock and can be found in such an exchange as:

<A> You know, I think I my grandmother last night
 Há, isn't she dead?

Other feedback mechanisms found in Example 7 include *is it* (to be discussed in further detail in the following section). After which, speaker B comes back with a response *ya* which gives the confirmation to what speaker A is asking.

c. Is It / Or Not

The tags *is it* (507 instances in data) and *or not* (155 instances in data) usually occur at the end of utterances to form (usually) polar interrogatives thus the function of which is to continue the conversation and elicit further feedback or a clarification from the other interlocutor. An example of the use of *is it* can be found in Example 7, lines #99 in response to the utterance in #98, where the tag is meant to formulate a polar interrogative,

of which the response is *ya* or 'yes'. *Is it* also functions to check the status of the information in the previous utterance in the sense of 'is that true?' Another example of the use of *is it* can be found in Example 8, lines #309 and #310, where the tag *is it* is used by speaker B to check the true intentions of speaker A.

Example 9, lines #55 and # 56 demonstrates how the tag *or not* is used at the end of the utterance signalling curiosity on the part of speaker C on speaker A's decision on whether to go on tour with the rest of the group. *Or not* thus functions to keep the communication open in the form of continued contact.

Example 8. ICE-SIN: S1A-080

Context: Discussion on Reading the Transcript

<\$A>
#301 Can we have a transcript of this speech [request]
<\$B>
#302 Conversation
<\$A>
#303 I'm I'm sure it's gonna be very funny [proposition]
<\$B>
#304 No there's nothing funny about it [contradiction, signalled by *no*]
<\$A>
#305 But it might not it might it might sound very ridiculous [contradiction, signalled by *but*]
<\$B>
#306 Why why will it sound ridiculous [interrogative, AR: challenge]
<\$A>
#307 I mean it might it might read very <unclear> word </unclear>
I mean when you speak it it's okay [clarification of intent]
<\$B>
#308 Yah when you actually see it in writing it's uh [confirmation, signalled by *yah*]
<\$A>
#309 Yah When can it be finished One week Tomorrow so fast [confirmation and continuation signalled by *yah*]
<\$B>
#310 You want to see it *is it* [clarification of intent signalled by *is it*]

Example 9. ICE-SIN: S1A-011

Context: Discussion on Going for a Holiday

<\$B>
#53 Are you are you going
<\$A>
#54 Oh <unclear> word </unclear> [signals uncertainty, AR: reluctance]
<\$C>
#55 'A' are you going *or not* [Tag question: 'Are you going?' in Standard English]
#56 Are you keen *or not* [Tag question: 'Are you keen?' in Standard English]

The exclamation *oh* in Example 9 gives the feedback of tentativity / uncertainty. *Oh*, if pronounced in a falling intonation, may also signal speaker A's reluctance to go on holiday with speakers B and C.

d. Ah

The particle *ah* occurs 1135 times in the data and it can be said with either a rising intonation or a falling intonation, both having separate functions. *Áh*, said with a rising intonation functions to indicate a warning with an approximate meaning of 'attend to this!' as in the following utterance:

<A> Drive carefully *áh*, your father will be very upset if something happens to the car.

It also functions to indicate an exclamation of surprise:

<A> I failed my history exam

 Áh, have you told your mom?

The falling intonation *àh* is the more common in the data and it functions to signal contact, perception and understanding as found in Example 10, where the *ah* in line #44 indicates that speaker B is listening to speaker A, thus keeping the communication lines open between the two interlocutors.

Example 10. ICE-SIN: S1A-098

Context: Discussion on Finding Baby-sitters

<\$A>

#38 And then there were no baby-sitters because all the all the Navigators staff girls were in camps in church camps and the Navigators camp and Teen NavTeens camp you know

#39 <unclear> word </unclear> camps you know

<\$B>

#40 Oh oh ya that's right *ah* whole line is feedback expression. CPU, realisation signalled by *oh* *ya,*

<\$A>

#41 So I told him please lah just stay back and nuh just keep an eye on the kids and work here

<\$B>

#42 Ya that's right ya [CPU, agreement / affirmation]

<\$A>

#43 Actually they're alright you know

<\$B>

#44 *Ah* [CPU, i.e., 'I'm listening, continue']

<\$A>

#45 Just need somebody to keep an eye you see

Example 11 shows another use of the particle *àh* with the function of reflecting on one's own proposition, performing a self-check on the information status. Lines #56 to #59 show the

sequence in which speaker B gives new information to speaker A and then speaker B goes on to check himself on what was just said. The *Eh* in line #57, which has the meaning of ‘wait a minute, let me see if that’s true’, functions to bring speaker B’s attention on what he had just said in line #56 and then he performs a check as signalled by the (most probably) the rising intonation of the particle *áh*, thus showing that he seeks to clarify what was just said. Speaker B’s clarification then comes in lines #58 and #59, where the particle *lah* at the end of the utterance in line #59 serves to signal speaker B’s conviction of what was previously said in line #58. The last instance of the use of *ah* in line #62 is similar in function to the *ah* used in Example 10 as it serves to signal contact, perception and the interest of keeping the communication going in the form of a polar interrogative tagged by *ah*.

Example 11. ICE-SIN: S1A-085
Context: Discussion on a Friend’s Schedule

<\$A>
#54 What time is Dharmendra’s interview
<\$B>
#55 Uhm he can go anytime between two to five
#56 Then he got veena <&> Indian classical instrument </&> at four to five
#57 *Eh* four to seven*ah* [interrogative. Check in information status of own utterance in #56]
#58 Four to five *ah* [realisation, signalled by *ah*]
#59 Should be four to five *lah* [confirmation signalled by *lah*]
#60 For what four to seven [reasoning, i.e., ‘why would it need be four to seven?’]
<\$A>
#61 <unclear> word </unclear>
<\$B>
#62 Can still continue *ah* [CPU, polar interrogative]

5.3. Attitudinal Reactions

5.3.1 Particles that Convey Rejection and/or Signal Solidarity:

- a. *lah*
- b. *lor*

a. Lah

The function of the *lah* when pronounced with a dropping intonation as in *làh*, is to give feedback in terms of rejection of what is previously uttered as in Example 12. Due to the Chinese substrate influence on SCE, the tone of rejection in line #248 is carried by both the *no* and the *lah*. The effect of the *lah* in this context also conveys the AR of conviction, where *lah* is used to emphasise *no* and where speaker B does not expect speaker A to come back with another argument or try to convince him otherwise.

Example 12. ICE-SIN: S1A-018
Context: Discussion on Buying a Stereo Set.

<\$A>
#247 You can get a Celestrian uh SL five
<\$B>
#248 *No lah* <unclear> word </unclear>
#249 I don't like the sound

If the *lah* was not used in line #248, as in so that the utterance become:

 No, I don't like the sound

then in an SCE context, speaker A is allowed to come back with another form of argument such as *but the Celestrian SL five is known for its sub-woofer effect*. The insertion of *lah* gives the feedback of closing of that line of argument, indicating that speaker B has already made up his/her mind on the matter.

Lah may also be used to emphasise affirmation or confirmation, the sequence of which is illustrated to the right in Example 13. The whole of line #211 is a feedback expression where speaker D gives confirmation to speaker C's utterance in line #210. It also shows speaker D's understanding and perception of the current topic.

Example 13. ICE-SIN: S1A-002
Context: Discussion on Friend Going for a Sex Change Operation

<\$B>
#208 So it's confirmed *is it* [polar interrogative formed by use of *is it* tag]
<\$D>
#209 Ya [answer and confirmation to question in line #208]
<\$C>
#210 She went for a sex change operation
<\$D>
#211 Ya *lah* [CPU, confirmation emphasised by use of *lah*]
<\$B>
#212 Sex change uh [CPU, AR: incredulous, signalled by the use of *uh*]
#213 *Whoa* [CPU, AR: shock / awe]
<\$D>
#214 Ya [CPU, confirmation]

Other feedback mechanisms that occur in Example 13 would be the *ya* in line #209 which is the giving of feedback in response to the polar question signalled by the eliciting factor, *is it* in line #208. *Whoa* in line #213 is functions to give the AR of shock or awe, since the topic of one of their friends going for a sex change is not usual to say the least.

And the last *ya* is in response to the question in line #212 where speaker D confirms the information status that speaker B searched for in line #212.

The use of *lah* with a rising intonation, as in *lah* is most often used to signal an interrogative in a declarative statement as in Example 14, line #176. In this instance, speaker B wants a confirmation on speaker A's implicit meaning of speaker A's utterance in line #175, that speaker A is unwilling to work on Sundays, so speaker B says *So you can't lah*, where the interrogative is signalled by the use of *lah*. The use of the particle *lah* also lets speaker A know that speaker B is 'following' the conversation and that speaker B is willing to carry on with the conversation. The *lah* in line #176 also signals speaker B's solidarity towards speaker A, in a sense where speaker B says *So you can't lah* as a form of understanding and agreement to speaker A's feelings about working on Sundays (i.e., it is not feasible to work on Sundays) in speaker A's previous utterance (line #175) that *sometimes Sundays you may need to come back to work*. The last use of the particle *lah* differs from the other two uses of *lah* since it functions to assert speaker B's point of view.

Example 14. ICE-SIN: S1A-046

Context: Discussion on Jobs

<\$A>

#174 Ya some executive I think written uh so they ask you whether
you are interested you know as an editor and that kind of stuff in SBC

#175 So no I mean I give my views because they say sometimes they they
look at my resume and then you know they say you're very involved in church
work but sometimes Sundays you may need to come back to work

<\$B>

#176 So you can't *lah* [CPU, interrogative signalled by *lah*]

<\$A>

#177 So I said no *lah* in that case you know [emphatic use of *lah* as line filler]

<\$B>

#178 Uhm ya I don't know hopefully I just in NUS that'll be good

#179 Boring job *lah* [AR: assertion signalled by *lah*]

b. Lor

The feedback giving function of *lor* as used in Example 15 line #208, functions together with *ya* to form a feedback expression. Apart from indicating agreement with what speaker A says in line #207, speaker C, by saying *ya lor* also marks the AR of solidarity with speaker A. Compare the feedback in line #208 to one that excludes the use of *lor* in the feedback expression so that the response is now just *ya*. That response, though in agreement with line #207, may be directed to the interlocutor who was in the first place telling speaker C some 'dirty joke' to begin with that warranted speaker C's harsh criticism of he/she not having any respect for speaker C. But the response *ya lor* while

going out to the relevant interlocutor, signals, at the same time, a camaraderie between speaker A and speaker C, so one may say that this *lor* signals an AR of biasness.

Example 15 ICE-SIN: S1A-031

Context: Taking Offense at 'Dirty Jokes'

<\$C>

#202 From now onwards don't talk dirty jokes in front of me

#203 I don't want to hear

#204 Don't talk

#205 Sorry

#206 Ya

<\$A>

#207 No respect

<\$C>

#208 *Ya lor*

#209 That's why

This same 'solidarity' marker of *lor* can also be found in Example 23, line #48, where speaker C lends affirmation towards speaker B's utterance. Since the particle *lor* follows the particle *ya* to form a single feedback expression, the function that *lor* has in the feedback expression is to give an indication of solidarity between the two interlocutors.

Other particles of feedback in Example 15 include the *ya* in #206, most probably a response to another interlocutor's apology (interlocutor *x*, i.e. the one who warranted the criticism for telling 'dirty jokes' to speaker C). So speaker C acknowledges the 'sorry' by interlocutor *x* by saying *ya* which has the equivalent meaning of 'yes, you bet you are'.

5.3.2 Particles that Signal Uncertainty:

a. *hor*

b. *so how*

The two particles *hor* and *so how* function mainly to elicit feedback from other interlocutors

a. Hor

The particle *hor* can be said with either a rising intonation *hór* or a falling intonation, *hòr*. The rising intonation *hór* seeks to solicit or elicit affirmation or confirmation on the most immediate utterance. Example 16 shows an instance of the use of the particle in lines #129 and # 130, in which *hór* serves to elicit a confirmation of what speaker A is saying. In line #130, *hor* can approximately be translated to mean, 'isn't it?' and in line #129, it means, 'Right, isn't it?'.

Example 16. ICE-SIN: S1A-006

Context: Discussing Left Over Party Food

<\$A>

#127 Ya you invite but people may not be able to make it you know

#128 So in the end nuh you got to eat it for so many days and then by
the time you eat nuh not nice already so many days

#129 Right *hor* [eliciting feedback to utterance in line #127 and #128]

#130 *Hor* [repetition of *hor* as reinforcement of elicitation in line #129]

In Example 17, the *hór* serves a similar function, where speaker B seeks to elicit some form of agreement or confirmation of the speaker B's point of view about the role of women in "sword fighting movies" as "flower pots" in line #280. However, speaker A needed clarification or a repetition of the previous utterance signalled by the use of *what* in line #282, after which speaker A then lends the confirmation / agreement as solicited by speaker B in line #280. The *hor* in this instance can be paraphrased approximately as 'isn't it?', to render the utterance *I mean sword fighting movies are always like that isn't it? The ladies are just flower pots.*

Other feedback mechanisms in Example 16 can be found in the use of *ya* in line #127 where speaker A is probably agreeing with what another interlocutor has previously mentioned but comes back with a rejection as signalled by the use of the word *but*. Both *ya* and *but* serve to give feedback on CPU, as in 'yes I hear you but I don't agree, here's my point of view' and keep up the ongoing exchange of information between interlocutors.

Example 17. ICE-SIN: S1A-041

<\$B>
 #280 I mean sword fighting movies are always like that *hor* [soliciting agreement signalled by *hor*]
 #281 The ladies are just flower pots
 <\$A>
 #282 What [WH-interrogative, signalling uncertainty or need for clarification]
 <\$B>
 #283 I mean I'm saying sword fighting movies [clarification / repetition of line #280]
 #284 Flower pots
 <\$A>
 #285 Flower pots [agreement signalled via repetition of line #284]
 #286 Uhm I don't like that [confirmation obtained for line #280 signalled by *uhm*]
 <\$B>
 #287 I don't like that too [confirmation / agreement via repetition and use of *too*]

The particle *hòr* with a falling intonation is used to indicate contact, perception and understanding as demonstrated in Example 18, line #13 where speaker A confirms the understanding and perception of speaker B's utterances from lines #10 to #12. The meaning of the particle *hor* as used in line #13 can approximately be translated as 'right, I see'.

Example 18. ICE-SIN: S1A-035
Context: Asking for Location of Friend

<A>
 #9 Where are you now
 <\$B>
 #10 I am with <unclear> word </unclear> Technologies uh Electronic and Engineering Department
 <\$A>
 #11 Singapore Electronic
 <\$B>
 #12 S E E L
 <\$A>
 #13 *Hor* [CPU on lines #10 to 12]

b. So How

The tag *so how* is an feedback eliciting device when used singularly, on top of which, its use functions to signal uncertainty, in addition to signalling the want and willingness by the interlocutor to keep the conversation going. An instance of

the use of *so how* can be found in Example 19, line #293, where three women are discussing other women using bikinis on the beach.

Example 19. ICE-SIN: S1A-011
Context: Discussion on Wearing Bikinis

<C>
#284 You know some of our people were wearing bikini
<\$A>
#285 Oh dear [AR: disapproval / dismay]
<\$B>
#286 Ya [CPU, confirmation to line #285]
<\$C>
#287 Ya [CPU, reinforcement / agreement]
<\$B>
#288 Oh dear [repetition. AR: disapproval / dismay]
<\$C>
#289 I don't know [AR: tentatitvity]
#290 I mean so ya lah
#291 I mean it's nice lah
#292 I I would say
<\$B>
#293 *So how* [CPU, AR: tentativity i.e., *what do we do?* or *so how does the situation go*]
<\$C>
#294 Just to laze around

Other feedback mechanisms found in Example 19 include *oh dear* as used in lines #285 and #288 to give feedback on an AR of dismay / unease. In the first instance of *oh dear* in line #285, speaker A gives feedback in terms of dismay and disapproval and the meaning of which can be seen as ‘Oh dear, that shouldn’t be happening’. After which speaker B confirms the dismay / disapproval as signalled by the use of *oh dear*, by the use of *ya* in line #286, which can mean ‘yes, exactly’. Speaker C in line #287 gives the same affirmative feedback to line #285. After which, speaker B repeats what speaker A has said earlier in line #285 with the exact same feedback *oh dear* and thus forms what seems to be the giving of feedback in a circular motion from lines #285 to #288 with all speakers first showing dismay / disapproval (line #285), then approval on the disapproval (lines #286 and #287) and then showing disapproval again (line #288).

Thus the *so how* that comes at the end of this circular feedbacking serves, in a sense to ‘break’ that circular feedbacking that has caught on in the conversation and as it were, drive the conversation forwards.

5.3.3. Particles that Convey Other Attitudes:

- a. 'A'
- b. *aiyah*
- c. *aiyoh*

a. 'A'

The particle 'A' functions to call attention to what the speaker is about to say and it usually signals enthusiasm on the speaker's part on what they are about to say. Example 20 shows an instance of the use of the particle 'A' in line #284 embedded within the feedback expression *oh ya 'A' uh*. The particle 'A' and *uh* are dissimilar in the sense that *uh* functions to lend time to the speaker, a split second where the speaker can use to collect his/her thoughts on what is to be said. In this sense, *uh* functions to tell the other interlocutors that speaker A needs time and perhaps not to interrupt speaker A as yet. *Uh* can be said to signal hesitation in this context. 'A' on the other hand, is used by speaker A to call speaker B's attention to what is about to be said and thus does not signal hesitation. The feedback expression *oh ya* in line #284 indicates a recollection on the part of speaker A on a certain issue / topic and it approximately translates to 'oh yes, now I remember'.

Other feedback mechanisms is the standard English use of the word *yes* in line #287 as a confirmation to the question posed in line #286 by speaker A.

Example 20. ICE-SIN: S1A-030

Context: Information on a Book

<A>

#284 Oh ya 'A' uh do you know where I can get the Dream of the Red Chamber [AR: enthusiasm, signalled by 'A', functions to call attention to what is to be said i.e, the book 'Dream of the Red Chamber']

#285 I want to borrow

#286 Is it in the library [interrogative, eliciting feedback]

<\$B>

#287 Yes it is in the library [CPU signalled by *yes*; confirmation]

In Example 21, line #399, speaker B uses the particle 'A' not only to call attention to what is about to be said but in this instance, the particle functions to convey speaker B's distaste for people singing in Chinese, so that the particle serves to convey the attitude of aversion to entity/event *x*.

Example 21. ICE-SIN: S1A-014

Context: Karaoke Singing

<\$B>

#393 Ya yesterday my husband was so disappointed he keep on asking the waitress and say 'any seats for two or not'

<\$A>

- #394 He likes to *singt* [polar interrogative signalled by *is it*, used in eliciting feedback]
<\$B>
#395 Ya [CPU, confirmation]
<\$A>
#396 Usually he sing what Chinese or English [WH-interrogative]
<\$B>
#397 English one
<\$A>
#398 English [CPU via repetition of utterance from line #397]
<\$B>
#399 'A' can't stand people singing Chinese [attention calling via use of 'A'; AR: aversion]

In line #399, the use of 'A' cannot be said to be substituted for an *I* due to the *pro-drop* or pronoun dropping phenomenon in SCE. Singaporeans usually drop their pronouns in sentence constructions since it seems an obvious fact that if a person is talking, then he/she obvious refers to himself/herself in sentences. Examples of pronoun dropping can be seen in the following constructions:

<A> want to go shopping

 yah sure

Where speaker A has left out the pronoun *you* in the question since it is understood between the two speakers that speaker A is referring to speaker B (and speaker A himself/herself) since speaker A is also asking the question in speaker B's direction.

Pronoun inclusion and use in SCE happens only if there arises an ambiguity. So when B says, '*A can't stand people singing Chinese*' she takes for granted that her friends know who and what she's referring to.

b. Aiyoh

The function of the particle *aiyoh*, apart from conveying contact, perception and understanding between interlocutors, is to convey dismay and regret, as can be seen in Example 22, line #139, which comes as a response from speaker B after speaker A has related a series of unfortunate events in terms of time wasted on travelling. The particle also conveys a certain sense of empathy towards the other speaker.

Example 22. ICE-SIN: S1A-001

Context: Discussion on Transport Problems

<A>

#134 I left my house at one met in school at two

#135 Suppose to meet at two

#136 Then some students came late you know came about two plus almost
three so we left West coast lah at three
#137 then we travelled uh okay we waited for a long time for fifty-one
after that took the train then up till Eunos
#138 uh the train broke down
<\$B>
#139 *Aiyah* [CPU, AR: despair / dismay / regret]

c. *Aiyah*

The particle *aiyah* differs from *aiyoh* in the sense that the former functions to convey a sense of irritation as well as dismay as found in Example 23, line #49. This sense of irritation is also conveyed in Example 24, where speaker A expresses agitation and irritation at the fact that they still cannot decide the destination of their holiday trip.

Example 23. ICE-SIN: S1A-011

Context: Discussion on People Who Slang in Their Speech

<\$B>
#45 I hated people who slang
#46 Wah I can't stand it and I can't understand
#47 That's the worst part

<\$C>
#48 *Ya lor* [CPU, confirmation to opinion expressed by speaker B in lines #45 to 47]
<\$B>
#49 *Aiyah* [AR: irritation and dismay]

Example 24. ICE-SIN: S1A-038

Context: Uttered During a Discussion on Holiday Destinations

<\$A>
#200 *Aiyah* still can't decide whether to go just Canada and
England or or a little bit of each

6. Conclusion and Limitations of Study

This paper serves to provide an overview of feedback and feedback particles that occur in Singapore English, taking into account, to a certain extent the tonal variations of some particles. However, the study is not meant to be an in-depth analysis of tonal variations of each particle and this study has not comprehensively covered the syntactic placing of the particles.

The richness of the feedback particles in Singapore English come from their functions to not only convey contact, perception and understanding, some particles also function to indicate the interlocutor's emotional responses and convey, quite precisely, their state of mind and the person's mood, i.e, irritation, dismay or assertion.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1. Basic Functions of Feedback Particles of Singapore English Including Repetitions

Key: G = giving feedback, E = eliciting feedback

Table 1. Basic Functions of Feedback Particles of Singapore English

Key: G = giving feedback, E = eliciting feedback

No.	No. of Occurrences	Feedback Particles	Contact	Perception	Understanding	Attitudinal Reactions
1.	4922	uh	G	G		hesitation
2.	3481	ya	G	G	G	areement / approval
3.	3112	uhm	G	G		hesitation
4.	2530	what	G	G	G	contradiction
5.	2072	no	G	G		contradiction
6.	1763	oh	G	G	G	realisation
7.	1654	lah	G	G		conviction
8.	1568	can	G	G	G	acknowledgement / approval
9.	1297	okay	G	G	G	
10.	1290	right	G	G	G / E	interrogative
11.	1135	ah	G	G		confirmation / check
12.	1101	how	G	G	G / E	Interrogative
13.	914	yes	G	G	G	approval / confirmation
14.	759	why	G	G	G / E	interrogative
15.	612	really	G	G	G / E	interrogative / surprise
16.	605	and then	G	G	G	continuation / interrogative
17.	507	is it	G	G	G / E	interrogative / check
18.	397	yah	G	G	G	approval / confirmation
19.	193	ya but	G	G	G	contradiction
20.	149	ha	G	G	G	continuation / check

21.	139	lor	G	G	G / E	directive / suggestion
22.	112	no lah	G	G	G	assertion / contradiction
23.	111	ya lah	G	G	G	assertion / affirmation (against one's will)
24.	109	uh huh	G	G	G	
25.	101	aye	G	G	G	surprise / despair
26.	86	aiyah	G	G	G	despair
27.	82	but uh	G	G	G	soft contradiction
28.	81	uhm but	G	G	G	agreement continued by contradiction
29.	74	okay lah	G	G	G	defeat / giving in
30.	72	whoa	G	G	G	surprise / bewilderment
31.	72	wah	G	G	G	surprise / bewilderment
32.	71	yeah	G	G	G	agreement / approval
33.	71	oh oh	G	G	G	realisation
34.	70	so how	G	G	G / E	interrogative / tentativity
35.	63	how come	G	G	G / E	interrogative
36.	63	hor	G	G	G	interrogative / request / signals new information
37.	60	oh no	G	G	G	despair / regret
38.	56	ya then	G	G	G / E	
39.	56	isn't it	G	G	G / E	
40.	40	ah ah	G	G	G	
41.	38	oh dear	G	G	G	despair / regret
42.	37	leh	G	G	G	confirmation /

						assertion
43.	33	aiyoh	G	G	G	despair / shock
44.	28	wow	G	G	G	awe / bewilderment
45.	17	meh	G	G	G / E	contradiction / disbelief
46.	17	mah	G	G	G	contradiction / assertion