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Author(s): Yoshimi Miyake

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Pragmatic particles and information structure in colloquial Indonesian dialogue

Yoshimi Miyake

Akita University

Abstract

In this paper, four pragmatic particles from Jakarta Indonesian, i.e. *sih*, *kok*, *lho*, *dong*, will be examined. I will address these particles by examining them from the perspectives of new topic vs old topic, new information vs old information, certainty vs uncertainty, positive evaluation vs negative evaluation, and finally, strong command vs soft command. The data comes from dialogues in two contemporary Indonesian films depicting life in Jakarta.

1. Introduction

Linguists of Indonesian language have claimed that Indonesian pragmatic particles have no significant referential semantic function, but rather they express speaker mood or are used for “emphasis” (Sneddon 2006, Errington 1985). However, these explanations do not answer an important question, namely ‘what are the differences between particles when the general meanings of them are the same?’

Indonesian native speakers often equate these particles with full lexical items. For example the particle *deh* denotes *jadi* ‘to be realized’, or *sudah* ‘already completed.’ (Atmosumarto 1994). The question then arises, why do the speakers choose to substitute *deh* for *jadi* or *sudah*?

Based on the assumption that they reflect the speaker and hearers’ access to the information and knowledge that the speaker wishes to convey, this paper will attempt to consider the functions of discourse particles as they are used in conversations depicted in film. I will also argue that in addition to differences in access to information the particles reflect the emotional condition of the interlocutors. That is, I hypothesize that in informal or casual conversation, the particles play significant roles in linking the knowledge and information accessible to speakers and hearers to their emotional states. I also argue that since many of the particles are polysemous, they require context dependent analysis.

Bataone (n.d.) compares the particles to Indonesian verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. He explains *sih* as a particle indicating inference or uncertainty, *kok* for surprise, accusation, or negative feeling, *deh* for softening imperatives or leading to finishing up certain tasks. He explains *lho* as a particle which expresses surprise.

Based on the hypothesis that the Indonesian cultural value of solidarity is

marked by the use of particles Wouk (2001) tried to place them along a scale of solidarity. According to her, the tags *kan* and *ya*, for example, denote a certain level of familiarity or informal relationship between the speaker and hearer .

Faizah (2007) conducted extensive studies of *ya* and other particles, focusing on contour variations. She classified the functions of the particles along three axes: Coherence; focusing on speech act types such as statement, command and warning; Topic, focusing on whether it is a new topic or old topic; and finally, politeness, constructing and maintaining a desired level of solidarity.

In this study, I will mainly analyze the particles *sih*, *lho*, *kok*, and *dong*, although brief discussion of another particle *dong* will be added when needed for making comparisons.

1. *sih*

Sih is a phrase final or sentence final particle. (It can also be used in an independent intonation unit.). In the dialogues of three films, *Ada apa dengan Cinta?* ‘What’s up with Cinta “love”?’, *Arisan* ‘Gathering’ and *Arisan 2* ‘Gathering 2’, the most frequently appearing particle is *sih*. *Sih* has the following functions:

1.1. Ironical question: Interrogative + *sih*

Immediately following interrogative markers, *sih* shows a more ironical attitude of the speaker as shown in (1) to (4):

- (1) (Observing the rude behavior of the addressee)

kamu itu apa, sih?
 you DEM what, *sih*
 ‘What are you, *sih*?’

- (2) (Referring to an instance of arrogant behavior by a man)

(dia) laki-laki gimana, sih, ya?
 He man how *sih* yeah
 ‘What kind of man is he, *sih*, yeah?’

- (3) (noticing the suitcase is very heavy),

isinya apa aja sih?
 Content-DEF. what just *sih*
 ‘What’s inside, *sih*?’

(4) (Commenting on a strange hair-do)

rambut kamu ngapain, sih?

hair you do what sih

What did you do with that hair, *sih*?

Sentence (5a) with *sih* shows that the questioner child is already tired, and he is not happy that somebody else may be coming. A lack of eagerness, fatigue, or irritation is denoted by *sih*.

(5a) (A little child asks)

om, siapa lagi, sih, yang datang?

uncle who else sih RE.Pro. come

'Uncle, who else *sih* is coming?'

(5b) without *sih* is a pure question sentence:

(5a) *om, siapa lagi yang datang?*

uncle who else RE.Pro. come

'Uncle, who else is coming?'

1.2. Complaining

Sih added to a descriptive statement connotes a negative feeling or complaining.

(6) *primitive banget, sih, airportnya.*

simple very sih airport

'The airport is so primitive, *sih*.'

(7) (A child is crying)

kamu, sih, buat nangis.

you sih, make cry

'You *sih* are the one who made him/her cry.'

1.3. Topic marker, comparing and contrasting

Sih can be used as a topic marker for comparing or contrasting. In (8) and (9) each of the speakers compares the current situation with past.

(8) *tahun lalu, sih, mamanya minta tas Birkin special edition.*

year past sih mom-DEF. ask bag Birkin special edition
 ‘(Compared with this year) last year, *sih*, my mom asked for a special edition Birkin bag.’

(9) *dulunya sih, datang ke sini cuma main saja.*

before *sih*, come to here only play just
 ‘(Compared with now) I used to come here only to have fun.’

In (10), the speaker compares what he wants and the reality.

(10) *maunya sih, gitu,*

desire *sih*, that way

tapi ntar aku disangka orang gila lagi
 but later I be considered person crazy again

sama orang-orang Jakarta.
 with/by people PL. Jakarta

‘(Differently from the reality), my desire is like that, but later I will be considered a crazy person again by Jakartan people.’

In (11) the speaker is comparing her own condition to the addressee:

(11) (Hearing that the woman has cancer)

buat saya, sih, berkah.
 for me, *sih*, blessing

‘For me, it is a blessing

saya juga kanker....rahim.
 me also canceruterus

‘I also have cancer, uterine cancer.’

1.4. Reasoning/justification

Sih connotes reasoning or justifying.

(12) (I don’t buy that)

soalnya mahal, sih
 because expensive *sih*

‘Because it is expensive, *sih*.’

1.5. Idiomatic expression: *masa sih*?

Masa sih meaning ‘how come’ is an idiomatic expression.

(13) (being given a compliment for looking slimmer)

masa sih, ini kayaknya efek baju, lho.
 how come, *sih*, this apparently effect outfit *lho*
 ‘How come, *sih*, it seems an effect of the outfit, *lho*.’

(14) (Hearing that Sakti was afraid of telling Mei that he is a gay.)

Sakti, masa sih gue pikiran secepit gitu?
 Sakti, how come *sih*, I think that-narrow like that
 ‘Sakti, how come *sih* you thought that I am that narrow-minded?’

2. *Lho*

Lho can be located at the sentence initial position as an exclamation for surprise, which I will discuss later. *Lho* as a phrase-final or sentence final-particle can be compared or contrasted with *sih* discussed in Section I. I will start my discussion by comparing them in sentence-final position.

2.1. Information and knowledge: *sih* and *lho*

When used at the end of a phrase/sentence, both particles *lho*, and *sih* emphasize the speaker’s emotion (Bataone n.d.). More importantly, *lho* provides new information while *sih* connotes a rather negative statement. Compare (15a) and (15b).

- (15a) *itu (Sakti) orangnya baik banget, lho.*
 (15b) *itu orangnya baik banget, sih.*
 that personality-DEF. good very lho/sih
 ‘He is such a nice guy, *lho/sih*.’

The difference between (15a) and (15b) is only the use of *lho* rather than *sih*. In (15a), the speaker introduces a character called Sakti as a very nice person, on the other hand in (15b), the speaker introduces Sakti as a very nice person but suggest that there may be some problems in him. (15a) is new information, whereas (15b) could be a response sentence to a certain statement such as “Sakti helped me”.

In (16a), a child speaker uses *lho* to provide new information about himself. Then the

uncle confirms the information, praises him, by using *sih* in (16b),

(16a) *uncle, aku sekarang udah bisa nulis namaku lho, uncle.*
 uncle, I now already can write name-my lho, uncle.
 ‘Uncle, I can already write my name, *lho*, uncle.’

(16b) *eh, pinter banget, sih.*
 EXC. smart very, sih
 ‘Wow, (you are) so smart, *sih*.’

2.2. Definiteness and emphasis

Lho connotes definiteness. In (17) the speaker boasts that she has joined five social meetings, by adding *lho*.

(17) *aku sebulan ikut arisan lima kali, lho.*
 I every month join arisan five times, lho
 ‘I join *arisan* (socialization meeting) five times a month, *lho*.’

2.3. Warning

Lho warns or gives strong advice. *Lho* added to an imperative form connotes a bad result if the hearer does not follow the command.

(18) *tunggu, lho.*
 wait IMP, lho.
 ‘Wait, (otherwise...) *lho*.’

(18a) without *lho* is a simple command form.

Cf. (18a) *Tunggu,*
 ‘Wait.’

(19) *kamu makan dulu, nanti lapar, lho.*
 you eat before, later hungry lho.
 ‘You eat now, otherwise you will get hungry, *lho*.’

(20) *cepatan bikin appointment keburu, penuh lho, nanti.*
 quickly make appointment hurry full lho later
 ‘Hurry up and make an appointment, otherwise it will get full *lho*, later.’

3. *Dong*

Above an imperative form which was added the particle *lho* was discussed. For comparison with *lho*, two other end of sentence particles, namely *deh*, and *dong* will be discussed.

3.1. Soft imperative

After the imperative form of a verb, *dong* is added to soften the imperative as in (21). Adding *dong* is often used for flirting purpose, especially when it is used by a woman as in (22). In both instances, the vowel for [o] is lengthened.

(21) *tenang, dong.*

calm, dong

‘Calm down, *dong*.’

(22) *sayang, jangan pulang, dong, ya?*

Darling, don't go home dong yeah

‘Darling, don't go home, *dong*, yeah?’

3.2. Pleading/ interrogative

This *dong* is similar to 3.1. above, but it does not co-occur with an imperative.

(23) (Hearing that people know he is gay)

kalau ga ada yang bilang trus siapa yang bilang, dong?

If NEG exist that say then who that say

‘If there is nobody who said (so), then who is the one?’

(24)a. *kata dokter, aku nggak bisa punya anak.*

say doctor I NEG can have child

‘The doctor said that I cannot have children.’

b. *sayang, kamu omong sesuatu, dong.*

darling you say something, dong.

‘Darling, you say something, *dong*.’

3.3. Definiteness

(25)a. *ya, kamu dong yang cukongin.*

yeah, you dong that contribute

'You *dong* are the one who should pay.'

- b. *masa tamu disuruh bayar, sih?*
 how come guest forced to pay, sih
 'How come that guests are forced to pay, sih?'

3.4. Cheering up

- (26)a. *kok bisa, dokter?*
kok, can doctor
 'Kok, is it possible?'
 b. *bisa aja, dong.*
 can plain *dong*
 'You can do that, *dong*'

4. *Kok*

Kok is also a highly polysemous particle. *Kok* can be located sentence initially, a point that I will discuss later. A sentence final particle *kok* connotes that the uttered sentence may well be against the expectation of the hearer.

4.1. Unexpected statement

- (27)a. *omong-omong, Nino ga datang?*
 talking.about Nino NEG. come
 'Talking about Nino, isn't he coming?'
 b. *Nino datang kok.*
 Nino come *kok*
 'Nino is coming, *kok*.'

- (28)a. *lo nggak capek, nih?*
 you NEG tired, *nih*
 'Aren't you tired?'
 b. *enggak, gue enggak cape, kok.*
 no I NEG. tired *kok*
 'No, I am not tired, *kok*.'

- (29)a. *ini kenal dulu, Andien.*
 this get.to.know before Andien
 'I am introducing (her) first, Andien.'

- b. *udah* *kenal*, *kok*.
 already know *kok*
 ‘We are already acquainted, *kok*.’

4.2. Statement of fact

Kok is added to a truthful statement to show the speaker’s assertion versus presumed skepticism of the hearer.

- (30) *sebenarnya aku juga masih mau tinggal disini, kok*.
 actually I also still want stay here *kok*
 ‘To tell the truth, I also want to still stay here, *kok*.’

4.3. Mitigating

In both (31) and (32), each of the speakers tries to show his/her caring attitude toward the addressee.

- (31) (Being asked if Bu Mei is tired)
Bu Mei *cuma* *ngantuk, kok*.
 Bu Mei only sleepy *kok*
 ‘I am just getting sleepy, *kok*.’

- (32) *ikut juga tidak apa.apa, kok*.
 join also NEG what *kok*
 ‘We don’t mind you coming with us, *kok*.’

4.4. Sentence initial particles *kok* and *lho*

Kok and *lho* are the only particles which can be located in the sentence initial position. The difference between *lho* and *kok* seems subtle. There is a time delay in (34) where *lho* is used. Also, *lho* seems stronger. For example, (34) was uttered by a psychiatrist from whom a patient asked for a few more sleeping pills.

- (33) *kok, bisa* *gitu?*
kok can like that
 ‘*Kok*, can it be like that?’

- (34) *lho, saya* *sudah* *kasih*.
 lho, I already give
 ‘*Lho*, I already gave (that) to you.’

5. Discussion

This paper examined the four particles *sih*, *dong*, *lho*, and *kok*. There are many other particles, such as *nih*, *deh*, *tuh*, *kan*, *ya*, *gak*, etc., whose use I have not yet studied. The four particles that are discussed here fit my hypothesis that they connote the speaker's proximity or distance vis-à-vis the information they s/he provides. Even if Indonesian speakers cannot articulate the similarities and differences among these particles in abstract terms, they are aware of the similarities and differences among them. The functions of the particles are shown in Table 1.

Interrogation	Command / Request	Description/Evaluation	Inference	Contrast / Comparison
<i>sih</i>		<i>sih</i>	<i>sih</i>	<i>sih</i>
<i>dong</i>	<i>dong</i>	<i>dong</i>		
	(?) <i>lho</i>	<i>lho</i>		
		<i>kok</i>	<i>kok</i>	<i>kok</i>
	(<i>deh</i>)			

Table 1. The functions of particles

The four most frequent particles, *sih*, *dong*, *lho*, and *kok*, can be either descriptive or evaluative. The emphatic particle *dong* has three of the five functions: questioning, command or request, and description or evaluation.

The most frequent particle *sih* has a descriptive/evaluative function, as well as an (ironically) questioning function. Unlike *dong*, *lho*, or *kok*, particle *sih* is used more for expressing uncertainty or for soliciting listeners' agreement. *Sih* is ubiquitous: it can be attached to a noun, adjective, verb, or adverb. It should also be noted that '*sih*' can be used in monologs.

Moreover, the high frequency of *sih* reflects the fact that a number of Indonesian colloquialisms are accompanied by tags, with which the interlocutors try to confirm their knowledge, information, or even their feelings about each other. Furthermore, the high frequency of *sih* furthermore shows that speakers tend to try to solicit agreement from hearers by adding tags, although often the topic supplemented with *sih* may connote rather negative sentiments.

Wouk 1998, 2001 and Faizah 2007 tried to analyze the pragmatic particles from a politeness point of view as well by having recourse to the idea of ‘solidarity’. The particle *dong* can be discussed as an indicator of solidarity, but it should be noted that other particles such as *sih* connote uncertainty or doubt, and may even express an impolite attitude, while *lho* can connote assertiveness - linguistic behaviors far from ‘solidarity’ or ‘politeness’.

Because of the polysemy of the particles, the study of them should be context-dependent. If we try to analyze particles in isolated sentences, we will encounter apparently contradictory functions. Connotations of the particles can be properly understood only by considering them in conversation sequences or pairs.

Finally, comparative or contrastive particles can be lodged only within the same column as shown in Table 1. Contrasts of new vs. old information, certainty vs. uncertainty, positive evaluation vs. negative evaluation, and stronger command vs. softer command, can be described as shown in Table 2.

1. <u>New information</u>	<	>	<u>Old information</u>
<i>lho</i>			<i>sih</i>
2. <u>Certainty</u>	<	>	<u>Uncertainty</u>
<i>lho</i>			<i>sih</i>
3. <u>Positive evaluation</u>	<	>	<u>Negative evaluation</u>
<i>dong</i>			<i>sih</i>
4. <u>Strong command</u>	<	>	<u>Soft command</u>
0			(<i>deh</i>)???

Table 2. The functions of particles in contrastive pairs

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