

Chinese Final Particles in Malaysian English

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Introduction

Malaysian Colloquial English (MCE) is spoken widely in Malaysia, and is influenced by Chinese in various ways. The use of originally Chinese final particles (CFPs) in MCE, such as *lah*, *lor*, *ma*, *ah* and *wei* affect the meaning of a sentence in ways that are often hard to describe. For example, what does *You go home lah* mean?

Aims

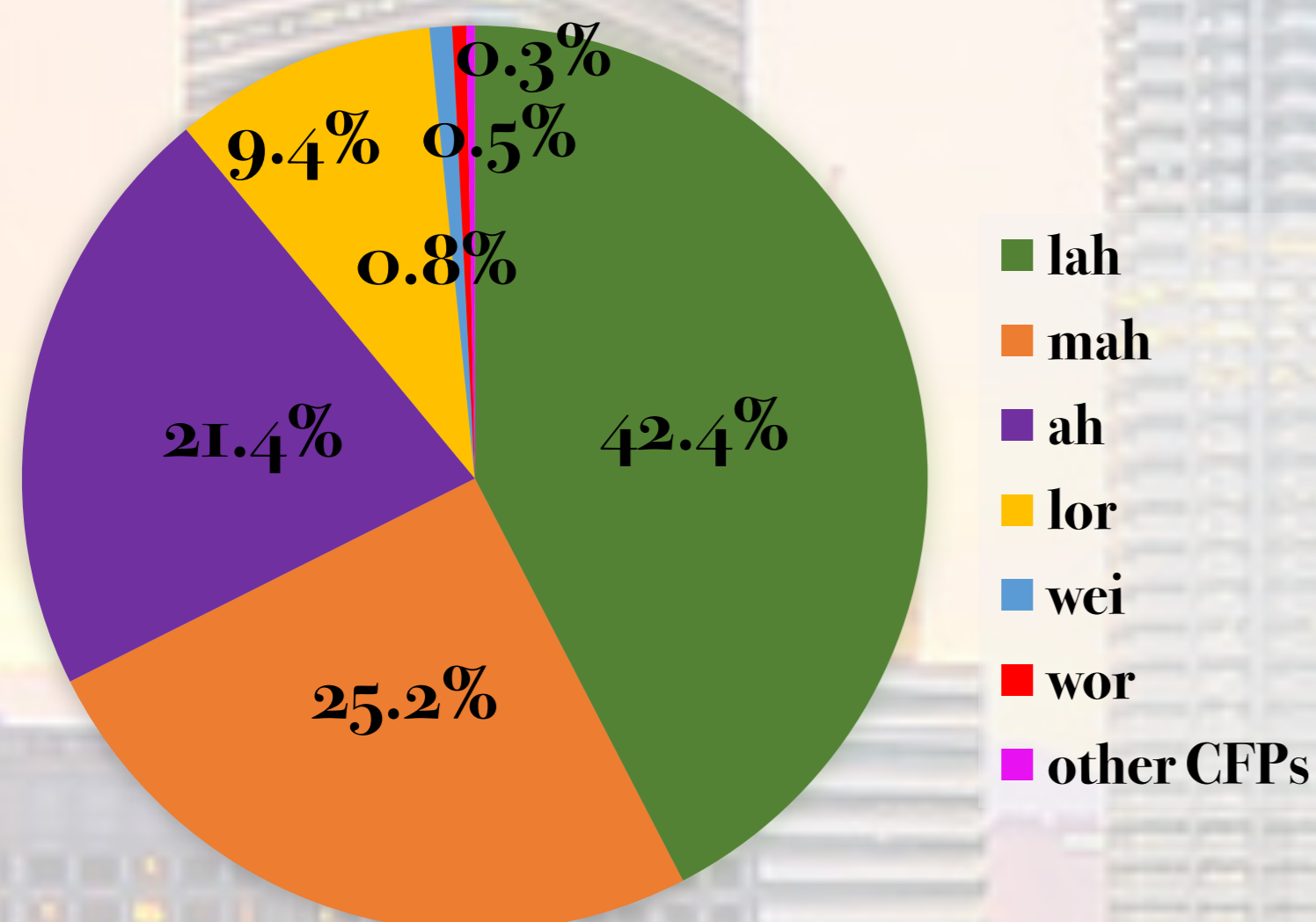
- To find out which non-English particles are used in MCE and what their precise effect is on the meaning of sentences
- To compare them with particles in Singapore English, the neighbouring dialect, which has been investigated more.

Methods

- How:** Data collected by dyadic interview (two people discussing)
- Where:** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- When:** 2018 Summer
- Who:** Chinese Malaysians aged 20 to 25. 8 people split into 4 groups.

Findings

Proportions of Chinese final particles (CFPs) in Malaysian Colloquial English (MCE)



* Based on my data

Chinese Final Particles (CFPs)	Functions:
1.) lah ₁ (with a lower tone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement expresses a confirmed piece of information Expressing strong belief without being discourteous
2.) lah ₂ (with a higher tone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis, urgency
3.) mah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'As you know'
4.) ah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrastive focus 'As you know' 'Etcetera' Threat (when put at both ends)
5.) lor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'As expected'
6.) wei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pleading.

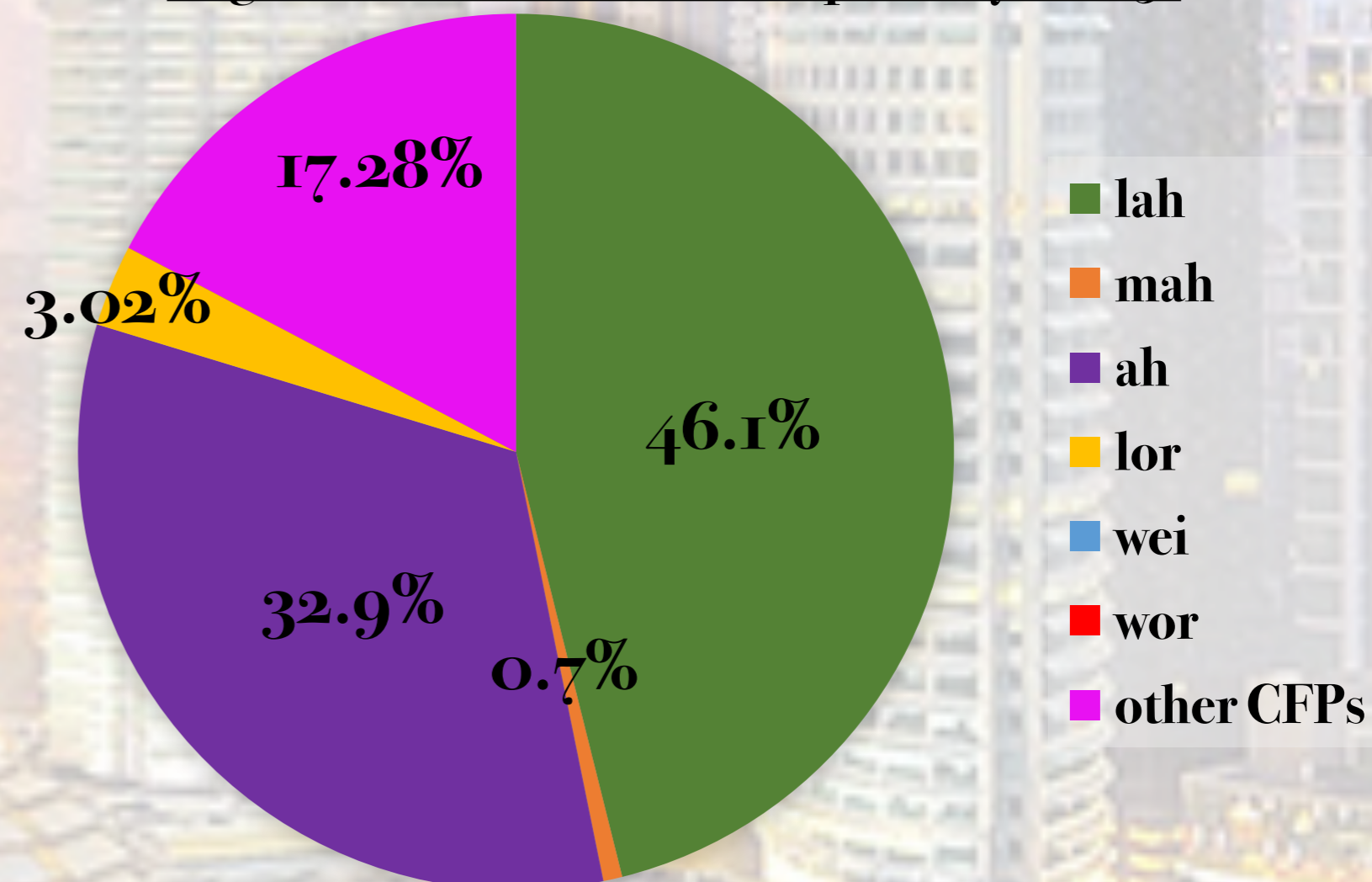
Table 1: Based on my data.

Discussion

CFPs	Examples	Malaysia Colloquial English (MCE)	Singapore Colloquial English (SCE)
1.) lah ₁ (with a lower tone)	You go home <i>lah₁</i> .	(I believe) You need to go home.	You must go home.
2.) lah ₂ (with a higher tone)	You go home <i>lah₂</i> .	You need to go home immediately.	You can/ should go home.
3.) mah	This is an apple <i>mah</i> .	As you know, this is an apple.	(Of course) it is obvious that this is an apple.
4.) ah	He finishes his assignment faster than him <i>ah</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He finishes his assessment quicker than HIM (but I don't know about her). It is obvious that he finishes his assignment faster than him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How come he finishes his assignment faster than him? He indeed finishes his assignment faster than him.
5.) lor	The red dress looks better <i>lor</i> .	The red dress looks better, as expected. .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The red dress obviously looks better. I think the red dress looks better.
6.) wei	I am hungry <i>wei</i> .	I am starving. Can I have some food now please?	

Table 2: The SCE paraphrases are based on Lay (2005).

Proportions of CFPs in Singapore colloquial English (SCE) in ICE-SIN corpus (Lay, 2005)



Conclusion

- The CFPs have in part different meaning/function in MCE and SCE.
- The CFPs occur in different proportions in MCE and SCE.
- wei* and *wor* are not widely used, possibly not used at all, in SCE

Future Work

- The more precise syntax of CFPs in MCH
- Particle clusters: Which orders do they have?
- CFPs in spoken and written colloquial language (Tay & al. 2016).
- Comparison with particles in other languages.

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References

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 [2] Tay, L.C., M.Y. Chan, N.T. Yap and B.E. Wong. 2016. 'Discourse particles in Malaysian English: What do they mean?'. *Brill* 172: 479-509.