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***Bah* in Singapore English**  
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**ABSTRACT:** Colloquial Singapore English (‘Singlish’) is well known, among other features, for its class of discourse particles derived from substrate languages. These particles have been ascribed to various languages, chief among them Southern Min, Malay, and Cantonese. Previous research has also shown this class to be open to newcomers, with Lim (2007) concentrating on particles of Cantonese origin appearing in the 1980s. In this paper, I present evidence of a previously undocumented particle, *bah*, whose origins are suspected in Mandarin, a variety that has hitherto contributed only little to the grammatical structure of Singlish. Using corpus data complemented by data from online discussion forums, as well as responses to an online survey, the paper describes *bah*’s pragmatic meanings and the socio-historical and sociolinguistic reasons for its emergence.

**INTRODUCTION**

Colloquial Singapore English (hereafter ‘Singlish’) is characterised by a heavily substrate-influenced grammar that has been described extensively (c.f., inter alia, Gupta 1994, Foley et al. 1998, Lim 2004, Leimgruber 2013a). At the lexical level, loanwords from Chinese varieties and from Malay are found. One category of items at the lexical-grammatical interface is that of discourse particles, which has also received ample scholarly attention. Discourse particles form an open class of lexical items that are typically restricted to clause-final position and convey pragmatic information. The open nature of this class is apparent in the changes it has undergone in the history of Singlish, with Lim (2007) reporting that some have only relatively recently entered the variety.

*The particle bah*

One particle that has received no attention to date is the particle *bah*. A homophonous element has been reported in Brunei English (Ozóg & Martin 1990), but its presence in Singlish has, to my knowledge, thus far gone unnoticed by scholars. Its use is illustrated in (1) below, in examples taken from the corpus *Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE, Davies 2013).

- (1) a. You can check with doctor **bah**, but I feel it should be safe enough.  
[GloWbE-614]  
b. feel like banning then ban **bah**.. don’t feel like it then don’t ban **bah**  
[GloWbE-696]  
c. for me, me and this gal are quite on good terms **bah**, she can tell me  
alot of her stuffs, and open up to me.<sup>1</sup>

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- d. if u like sumone, u wont want her to just treat u as a brother or friend **bah**<sup>1</sup>
- e. June: Where is it ah? # Me: I think should be upstairs **bah**. [GloWbE-684]
- f. i think be prepared to set aside at least 1-2 hours **bah**. [GloWbE-676]
- g. feel like banning then ban **bah**.. don't feel like it then don't ban **bah**.. [GloWbE-696]

The pragmatic meanings of this particle will be discussed at greater length in section 3. Its main function is to mark uncertainty vis-à-vis the preceding proposition. This proposition often has the illocutionary force of an advice, as in (1a–b). Uncertainty as to the truth-value of the preceding proposition is evidenced in (1c) and (1e), where the information given by the user is hedged considerably by the particle *bah*. Additionally, it has a non-committal dimension which, as shown in (1f–g), serves to reduce the commitment of the user towards the advice that precedes the particle.

#### *Data*

The reference corpus of spoken Singapore English is ICE-SIN (<http://ice-corpora.net/ice/icesin.htm>). Unfortunately, no instances of *bah* were found in ICE, probably due to its limited size of some 1 million words. The primary source of data for the analysis in this paper therefore comes from computer-mediated communication (CMC), particularly data from discussion forums and blogs. Two main corpora are used: online data from GloWbE, the Global Web-Based English corpus (Davies 2013), and discussion forums posts from sgforums.com (previously used by Deuber & Sand 2013, hereafter SGForums). GloWbE is useful for its total size of 1.9 billion words (with 43 million words in the Singapore component), and also because its data is linked to the original source, so that usage of *bah* in an extended conversational context is easily retrievable.

Searches were tailored to elicit as many instances of the *bah* particle as possible. Spelling is not standardised (as for all the Singlish particles), such that all of <bah>, <ba>, <bu>, and <buh> were included in the search string (<bah> and <ba> seemed to be the preferred variants). Manual sorting of the resulting 720 GloWbE results was necessary to eliminate noise such as 24 typographical errors (*bu tmost health authorities, It's very much inspired bu the story of Frankenstein*), 150 transliterations of non-English sequences (*ba gua, chio bu, bah long long, ba kut teh, suen le ba*), 363 proper names (*BA* [British Airways], *Demba Ba, Zhang Ba*), 113 abbreviations (of which 76 for 'Bachelor of Arts'), 7 onomatopoeic uses (*All I heard was, "And I de bah de blah de la bla deh side my hands"*), and one 'bah humbug' example (*You might want to refrain from saying "Bah!" to anyone who wishes you a Merry Christmas*). There were also 31 examples of a *bah* that was glossed as 'dismissal', as in (2) below, and two instances of <buh> used as an expression of surprise or feigned failure to understand, as in (3). In the end, only 29 relevant instances of *bah* remained (see appendix).

- (2) a. **Bah**, none of these posters will work [GloWbE-631]
- b. **Bah!** Stupid teenagers! [GloWbE-526]
- c. Instant deflation. **Bah**. Never mind, they'll all be old then [GloWbE-673]
- d. Same price but without the brush! **Bah!** [GloWbE-524]

- (3) a. across his shoulders reading “Drunkard’s Dream Rock Steady” **Buh?**  
Does that mean something? [GloWbE-735]
- b. We know you’ll make money some day!” **Buh?** [GloWbE-739]

In addition to the 29 in GloWbE, there were six instances of *bah* in the 100,000-word-sized SGForums; ICE-SIN, as mentioned above, does not feature any. The reason for the vast discrepancy in relative frequency surely has to do with genre (c.f. Deuber & Sand 2013), given that the former consists primarily of interactive, asynchronous CMC (in the case of forums) and the latter of a range of genres (formal and informal online data, including newspaper articles as well as online discussion forums). In this article, examples from GloWbE are identified with *GloWbE-#*, where # refers to the example’s number in the concordance list given in the appendix. Examples from other sources are identified with a URL in an endnote.

The pragmatic meanings of *bah* were elicited from 93 native speaker informants by means of a short online questionnaire (reproduced in the appendix), distributed by the ‘friend-of-a-friend’ method (Milroy 1987) beginning with the author’s own network in Singapore. Four snippets of CMC from GloWbE and other sources were presented, and sentences rephrasing or contextualising the *bah*-clause were given as options to be marked as correct or incorrect. A final question offered a choice of nine definitions, and one questioned the difference between *bah* and *leh* (the reason for which is explained below). Each question had a comment box for additional remarks on the use of the particle.

#### *Singlish discourse particles*

The Singlish discourse particles of interest here are those that are substrate-derived and specific to the variety (though many are also found in Malaysian English, see e.g. Gupta 2006, Rajadurai 2007). They are typically monosyllabic, clause-final, and may carry tone (Platt 1987, Lim 2008). Sociolinguistically, they have been described as lending Singlish ‘its special flavour’ (Ler 2006: 149), as ‘critical identifiers’ (Gupta 2006: 258) and as a ‘stereotypical feature’ (Leimgruber 2013a: 84) of the basilect. The number of discourse particles described for Singlish differs from one author to the other; in Leimgruber (2013a: 92–94) a list of eleven is given, with the various definitions given by various authors. From this list, the nine in Table 1 have been selected as being most widely attested in the literature. They are here defined based on Lim (2007), with additional definitions from Gupta (1992) and Wee (2004).

Table 1. The Singlish discourse particles.

<b>Particle</b>	<b>Definition (from Lim 2007, except where stated otherwise)</b>
<b>lah</b>	draws attention to mood or attitude and appeals for accommodation; indicates solidarity, familiarity, informality
<b>ah</b>	signals continuation and keeps interlocutors in contact; softens command; marks a question expecting agreement [...] [or] requiring response
<b>what</b>	indicates that information is obvious, contradicting something previously asserted
<b>lor</b>	indicates a sense of obviousness as well as resignation
<b>hah</b>	marks wh- or declarative question, or asks for repetition (Wee 2004)
<b>hor</b>	asserts and elicits support for a proposition (Gupta 1992)
<b>leh</b>	• marks a question involving comparison

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	• equivalent to ‘what about?’ (Platt 1987)
	• marks a tentative suggestion or request (Wee 2004)
<b>meh</b>	marks a question involving scepticism
<b>mah</b>	indicates obviousness

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*Lah* is a frequent particle (Gupta 1992, Smakman & Wagenaar 2013, Leimgruber 2013a) and also the particle that has received most attention, both from linguists and laypersons. It is variously described as a marker of ‘new information’ and ‘certainty’ (Platt 1987), as ‘persuasive’ (Kwan-Terry 1991), as ‘assertive [and] appeals to [...] accommodate’ (Gupta 1992), as a marker of solidarity (Wee 2004), as any one of ‘solidarity, emphasis, obviousness, persuasion, friendliness, hostility’ (Ler 2006), or ‘familiarity, informality’ (Lim 2007). This rather wide array of meanings also results in some overlaps with other particles, particularly for the ‘obviousness’ meaning, which is also reported for *lor*, *what*, and *mah*.

A wide range of functions also exists for *leh*, which can be a question marker (Lim 2007), an equivalent to ‘what about?’ (Platt 1987), and a marker of tentativeness in suggestions or requests (Wee 2004). This last property suggests overlap between *leh* and *bah*. This overlap, however, is not complete, in that *bah* combines tentativeness with a degree of uncertainty: some informants even state that *leh* is ‘more confident’ than *bah* and even ‘reinforcing’, i.e. attributes quite at odds with Wee’s ‘tentative’. This issue is addressed in more detail in section 3.

The literature offers several proposals at modelling the particles as part of a system (Gupta 1992; Wong 1994, 2004; Ler 2006; Gupta 2006; Lim 2007). Gupta (1992: 37), for instance, uses a ‘scale of assertiveness’, essentially a continuum from maximally assertive to tentative, on which individual particles are located. This scale, presented in Figure 1, lists particles in order of decreasing assertiveness, starting with the ‘contradictory’ *mah* and *what*, through the ‘assertive’ *meh*, *geh*,<sup>2</sup> *leh*, *na*, *lah*, and *lor*, and ending with the ‘tentative’ *hor*, *hah*, and *ah*.

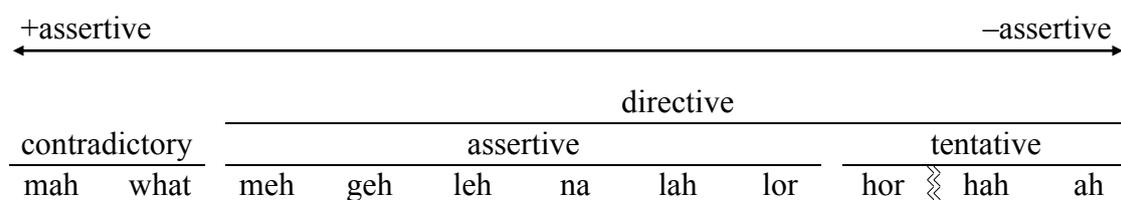


Figure 1. The Singlish particles on a scale of assertiveness (Gupta 1992: 37). The double wave indicates the proposed location of *bah* (see below).

The usefulness of such a classification (which has been criticised, see e.g. Wong 1994) lies in its ability to provide an easily workable framework for the analysis of these particles and, more crucially, makes a case for them to be treated as part of a single class. This approach of considering Singlish particles part of a single (perhaps open) class is also taken by other authors (see e.g. Lim 2007, Smakman & Wagenaar 2013), and will be useful later in this article when integrating *bah* into such a system.

## ORIGINS

### *Malay and Malaysian English*

While there does not seem to be a particle *bah* in Standard Malay, both Hassan et al (2012: 332) and Gupta (2006: 29) report the use of *bah* – in examples (4) and (5) respectively – in online data from East Malaysia. A specific discussion of *bah* is not germane to Gupta's contribution, but Hassan et al do list *bah* as one of several discourse particles occurring in colloquial Malaysian English. Unfortunately, their explanation of *bah* is limited to the observation that it 'is used to seek empathy from the readers' of the blog and that it originates in an unidentified Sabahan language.

- (4) wanted to add some zombies and ghosts but also no moneyyy... **bah**...
- (5) A: You want the cake and makan<sup>3</sup> as well? [...]  
B: Aiyo Sifu...  
The point is you all can makan... not us in Sarawak-**bah**....we only can see and salivate mah....

The example by Hassan et al (2012: 332), when seen in context, actually uses *bah* clause-initially and not finally. The paragraph in (6) follows a description of a game the author has recently started playing on the social networking site Facebook. This is unlike the syntactic constraints on Singlish discourse particles, which are typically restricted to clause-final position; it is also pragmatically different from (5), where there is no direct plea for assistance from the audience. Similarly, 'empathy' is not a necessary element of the Singlish *bah*.

- (6) my graveyard is still empty... wanted to add some zombies and ghosts but also no moneyyy... **bah**, be generous u guys... send me some ghosts as well... and if you're more generous, maybe you can send me those items in my wishlist too...<sup>4</sup>

Data from GloWbE do suggest that a *bah* similar to Singlish *bah* is in use in Malaysia: its Malaysian component returns 654 tokens for the string 'bah|ba|buh|bu'. After elimination of many instances of Malay-only sequences (*Masa itu macam duit dan rezeki turun dari langit bah.*), proper names (*Ba'kelalan, Demba Ba, Tony Bah*), loanwords from Arabic (*Ka'bah, khuṭbah*), 'dismissive' uses such as those in (2), some duplicates, and several dozen instances of *Bahá'i* (rendered in GloWbE as <Bah ' >), eleven tokens of *bah* remain where a function similar to the one in Singlish is observed. The examples in (7) show *bah* can be used in Malaysian English in a way comparable to Singlish: here too, uncertainty can be read into (7c,e,g), tentativeness in (7a,d) and non-commitment in (7b,h).

- (7) a. This is the most basic html codes **bah** .... if you really want to learn more, you can google  
b. Man-D and I can still meet you on the 5th **bah** .. must meet the famous STP!  
c. Sabah politic is much too matured for you to digest **bah**  
d. Festival meal; should bring girlfriend home to meet family **bah**. Apparently there was some issue between you two before.

- e. But I mind to get 1K a month **bah** .. as long as I have free time to venture other business
- f. Don't like don't read **bah**.
- g. their dirty towns, I guess nothing is going to change **bah**!
- h. that will cover his tuition at state operated colleges and pay **bah**.

### *Brunei English*

Despite the geographical proximity and ethnolinguistic similarities between Brunei and East Malaysia, Brunei English deserves separate treatment here, because of the presence of a particle *bah* in Brunei English that has been reported as early as the late 1980s (Ozóg & Martin 1990). Whether Brunei English is a possible source for Singlish *bah* is less than certain, however. Brunei and Singapore certainly do share some characteristics: both are small, prosperous states within ASEAN, both have Malay and Chinese ethnic groups in their population (although the Chinese are a majority in Singapore and the Malays a majority in Brunei), and both use English for some or most official purposes. On the other hand, the sociolinguistics of the two countries are rather different. Certainly, as Ozóg & Martin (1990) propose, Malay is the main substrate influence on Brunei English. The substrate languages of Singlish include Malay, but also southern varieties of Chinese, whose speakers outnumbered the local Malays from the very early colonial days (for a thorough sociohistorical account of Singapore, see Gupta 1994). The discourse particles of Singlish tend, for the majority, to originate in Cantonese (Lim 2007), with the exception of the older *lah*, *ah*, and *what*.

Ozóg & Martin (1990) argue that in Brunei English, *bah* originates in Brunei Malay, where, according to Simanjuntak (1988), it is a clitic that is not found in other varieties of Malay. In Brunei Malay, *bah* softens the force of an utterance, particularly when combined with the clitic *tah*, as in example (8), cited from Simanjuntak (1988) in Ozóg & Martin (1990: 18).

- |                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| (8) Bah, maritah kitani bajalan. | [Brunei Malay]   |
| Marilah kita berjalan.           | [Standard Malay] |
| ‘Come on, let’s go.’             |                  |

Brunei English *bah* can occur after predicative adjectives, nouns, and verbs. Typically, the utterance has negative connotations, though this need not be the case. Pragmatically, it has a much wider scope of applications than in Brunei Malay. Ozóg & Martin (1990:23–25) list the following:

- (a) Affirmation, agreement, confirmation, or acknowledgement to an accession or command. In this case, *bah* can occur on its own. E.g. ‘A: You want to come with me? B: Bah.’
- (b) Invitation. E.g. ‘Bah. Please eat.’
- (c) Parting comment as part of a leave-taking ritual. E.g. ‘A: Let’s go. B: Bah.’
- (d) Closing comment, both in face-to-face and telephone discourse. E.g. ‘A: See you. B: Bah.’
- (e) Phatic acknowledgement to *thank you*-type utterances. E.g.: ‘A: Thank you. B: Bah.’

Ozóg & Martin (1990: 22) repeatedly reaffirm the importance of the fact that *bah* is a ‘particle whose correct usage signifies that both the speaker and the listener are

members of the Brunei speech community'. They further claim it marks 'solidarity and rapport' similarly to *lah* in Singapore and Malaysian English, adding that it differs from the latter in pragmatic scope and in syntactic position (except for *ah* and *hor*, none of the Singlish discourse particles can occur in isolation).

While Brunei English *bah* is phonetically identical to Singlish *bah*, there appear to be significant differences at the syntactic and the pragmatic levels: none of the uses listed above (Ozóg & Martin 1990:23–25) are possible in Singlish. Contrary to the Brunei English meanings of 'affirmation, agreement, confirmation' (as in (a) above), Singlish *bah* would be situated in the 'tentative' part of Gupta's 'scale of assertiveness' (Gupta 1992: 37), as the following section will show in more detail.

### Chinese

Having established Brunei English and Malay as unlikely sources of Singlish *bah*, we need to turn to Chinese. Mandarin Chinese, now a widespread language in Singapore, has become so only over the past generation thanks to consistent and forceful language planning efforts (see e.g. Pakir 1999, Bokhorst-Heng 1998, Leimgruber 2013b). Previously, and to this day among the older generation, the majority spoke varieties of Southern Min (Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, etc.) and Yue (Cantonese). As far as discourse particles are concerned, Chinese was instrumental in shaping Singlish; Lim (2007) posits a Cantonese origin for the particles *lor*, *hor*, *leh*, *meh*, *mah*, and a Hokkien and/or Malay origin for *lah*, *ah*, and *what*.

**Cantonese**, usually prolific in its use of clause-final particles, does not appear to have a particle that phonetically resembles *bah*. There does exist, however, a bisyllabic particle *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>* that carries a meaning of 'giving up', as in (9) below:

- (9) Ci<sub>5</sub>fu<sub>4</sub> ngo<sub>5</sub> bong<sub>1</sub> m<sub>4</sub> dou<sub>3</sub>\*<sub>2</sub> nei<sub>5</sub>, dou<sub>1</sub>hai<sub>6</sub> gaau<sub>1</sub> go<sub>3</sub> bo<sub>1</sub> bei<sub>2</sub>jan<sub>4</sub> baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>.  
'Seems there's nothing I can do to help you so I'm just gonna have to pass the buck on to someone else.'<sup>5</sup>

Tang (2009), in an article on *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>*, quotes Cheung's (2007: 207) definition of the particle as marking 'suggestions or advice' [提議或勸告的意味], and mentions its pragmatic meaning as 'decisively opting for another choice, and not to haggle over something' [決斷, 含有另作選擇, 不再計較的意思] (Li 1995: 516). Tang further compares *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>* with *le<sub>4</sub>* (咧, similar in form and function to Singlish *leh*). He considers both to share the same grammatical features, as well as the same semantic meaning of imperativity. Pragmatically, *leh* is considered less clear and final than *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>* (Tang 2009: 425).

The Cantonese particle, however, does not appear without the following *laa<sub>1</sub>*. There is the possibility that *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>laa<sub>1</sub>* was borrowed from Cantonese into Singlish as simply *baa<sub>6</sub>\*<sub>2</sub>*, the *laa<sub>1</sub>* having been reanalysed as the pre-existing Singlish *lah*. This is, however, unlikely given the tone of the particle in Cantonese, which is high level, whereas *lah* in Singlish is variously described as having either rising, falling, fall-rising, low or mid-rising tones (Lim 2007: 448). Therefore, our attention has to turn to Southern Min and, later, Mandarin.

**Hokkien** (Bodman 1955) seems to entirely lack a particle that is equivalent in form and function to Singlish *bah*. On the other hand, **Mandarin** has a well-described clause-final particle *ba* (吧/罢). Chao (1968: 807–808) identifies two particles *ba*, the first one having two uses, as an 'advisative' particle (10a) and as punctuating alternative suppositions (10b). Both examples are from Chao (1968: 807), adapted to the Pinyin romanisation.

- (10) a. Kuài diǎn zǒu ba!  
‘Better hurry up and go!’
- b. Bù gěi qián ba, bù hǎoyìsi; gěi qián ba, yòu gěi bù qǐ.  
‘Suppose I don’t pay for it, I am ashamed to take something for nothing; and if I am to pay for it, I can’t afford it.’

The first *ba* is ‘a reduced form of the verb 罢 *bà* “finish” (Chao 1968: 807). The second *ba* in Chao’s analysis is ‘a fusion of 不啊 *bù a*’ and used in polar interrogatives (11a) and in ‘doubtful posed statements’ (11b).

- (11) a. Nǐ zhīdǎo ba?  
‘Do you know?’
- b. Nǐ zhīdǎo ba?  
‘You know, I suppose?’

Li & Thompson (1981) give a longer explanation of *ba*’s functions; they mention that the particle ‘can best be described as equivalent to that of the “Don’t you think so?” or “Wouldn’t you agree?” type of question that is tagged onto a statement in English’ (Li & Thompson 1981: 307). They gloss the particle as ‘solicit[s] agreement’, which explains its frequent co-occurrence after first person plural commands, as in (12a). They also report Chao’s ‘advisative’ function, further explaining that the particle ‘signal[s] a solicitation of approval/agreement’ (Li & Thompson 1981: 308), resulting, as in (12b), in an ‘advice’. The solicitation of agreement effected by the particle is nicely illustrated by the contrasting pair in (12c), again from Li & Thompson (1981: 309), where the speaker might be factual or angry in (12c.i) but can only be ‘accommodating and conciliatory’ in (12c.ii). All examples in (12) and (13) are from Li & Thompson with their glosses.

- (12) a. Wǒmen zǒu ba!  
‘Let’s go!’
- b. Nǐ hē shuǐ ba!  
‘Why don’t you drink some water?’
- c. i. Tā bù huì zuò zhèyàng de shì.  
‘S/He wouldn’t do such things.’
- ii. Tā bù huì zuò zhèyàng de shì ba.  
‘S/He wouldn’t do such things, don’t you agree?’

Li & Thompson (1981: 309–310) conclude their discussion of *ba* by reiterating that it is ‘comparable to the function of a tag question’, in that it ‘seeks confirmation of a statement’. They give example (13), where both alternatives convey the same meaning:

- (13) a. Tā hěn hǎokàn ba.  
‘S/He is very good looking, don’t you agree?’

- b. Tā hěn hǎokàn, duì bu duì?  
'S/He is very good looking, isn't s/he?'

It would appear that none of the candidate languages presented here fit the definition of Singlish *bah* perfectly. Nevertheless, Mandarin seems to have a particle that is at least superficially similar to the one in Singlish. As the next section will show, core pragmatic meanings of Singlish *bah*, such as elements of accommodation, advice, and, more generally, tentativeness, echo the uses of Mandarin *ba*. The reason as to why Mandarin (as opposed to Cantonese, Hokkien, or Malay) should be the source for Singlish *bah* will be discussed later. I now turn to a description of the particle itself.

### SINGLISH BAH

Syntactically, *bah* in Singlish occurs only clause-finally, in keeping with the general syntactic constraints of the other Singlish discourse particles. It also cannot appear in isolation – only *hor* and *ah* can do so. While *bah* need not be utterance-final, it always comes at the end of a clause.

#### *Pragmatic meaning*

Pragmatically, *bah* conveys uncertainty and tentativeness, typically in directives that express the illocutionary force of suggestion or advice. It marks a proposition as non-committal. A first example of its use can be found in (14). Here A has opened the discussion with a practical question, and B offers an answer ('A deed poll should do it, I think.'). The response is a tentative suggestion, a statement of opinion rather than expert knowledge, presented and hedged in a way that other particles would not achieve. For example, the use of *leh* in this instance would convey a stronger sense of certainty in B's response, whereas *bah* signals a less confident stance. In the survey, 65% of respondents said that writer B is 'not sure if a deed poll will work'.

- (14) A: Is it possible to change our surnames here in sg since we can change our first names too? [...]  
B: should be deed poll **ba**  
even people whose surname is from dialect (eg. Teo) want to change officially to (eg. Zhang) also must deed poll<sup>6</sup>

The non-committal dimension of *bah* can also be seen in (15), where C mildly disagrees with B's response. The opening with *subjective* in itself signals disagreement with the previous accusation of wilful misunderstanding; coupled with *bah*, the potentially confrontational tone resulting from this contradiction is attenuated. In addition, the majority of survey respondents opted for 'uncertainty' as the main meaning in this example. In (16), C chimes into the discussion by agreeing with the previous posters, marking their agreement with *bah* in 'same view too bah'. This usage similarly reduces the force of the agreement, by mitigating C's commitment to their concurrence with A and B's views – a mitigation further seen in the choice of *scary* in the following sentence and the final particle *leh* (here <le>), which marks a tentative suggestion.

- (15) A: For fun, mates:

What pisses you off the most?  
Leave your interesting comments and responses below!

[...]

B: People who refused to understand your explanation.....

C: [quotes B]

subjective **ba**...

ppl are entitled to different view and opinion ma...<sup>7</sup>

(16) A: i think woman should be cane if they commit same offence as theman,  
but i feel a smaller cane should be used on woman.

[...]

B: Yah same view from me too.

[...]

C: same view too **bah**... if is the rotan used for men then is too scary le..<sup>8</sup>

Its most common use remains that of reducing the force of the impact of the speaker's utterance. In (17), the writer is bemoaning the fact that he is about to spend seven weeks of National Service (on Pulau Tekong, an island used by the military). He prefaces his disapproval ('dun want to waste time') with a stretch of pseudo-direct speech 'dun complain and just go bah', the particle here reducing the blow of the imagined rebuke. Then there are instances such as (18) and (19), where the user responds to a simple request for information, advice, or experience with a statement that is postposed with the particle *bah*, thus clearly marking it as less than certain and, it could be argued, stressing that it is a personal opinion (18) or experience (19). For (18), survey respondents were split between the interpretation that B was 'convinced that this is normal' and that he or she was unsure about it.

(17) guess many ppl will say dun complain and just go **bah**, bt kinda dun want to waste time again in tekong. [GloWbE-612]

(18) A: I'm now in the 6th week and planning to make appointment with gynae this week [...] Constantly feeling hungry but will feel bloated once food is in or even gastric. Is it normal? [...]

B: I had the same experience too.. [...] I also eat slower than before and get full easily during meals.. feel bloated aft tat.. think this is normal **bah**.. [GloWbE-701]<sup>9</sup>

(19) A: But the waiting time should be longer than a few hours right ? Hope that all the parts will be in stock at TP . [...]

B: Waiting time, i think be prepared to set aside at least 1-2 hours **bah**.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the example in (20) shows the particle being used in a comment about a third person. In this thread, the original poster asked for comments on his action consisting in publicly debasing an otherwise 'show-off and annoying' person who 'likes to hao-lian', i.e. who is 'arrogant, cocky, smart-alecky' (Lee 2004; *haolian* is usually an adjective). He mentions his wife said he shouldn't have 'stoop[ed] to his level'. In response, the author of (20) takes the wife's point of view, essentially criticising the original writer's actions. The poster then tells the addressee to resign himself to the situation (resignation also being conveyed by the particle *lor*), and to just accept the annoying person as he is ('so be it *bah*'). The use of *bah* here has the

effect of framing the comment about the third person as a personal view, as well as diminishing the seriousness of the poster's stance, which is, after all, disagreement with the addressee's handling of the situation and a refusal to offer him the sympathy he might have been hoping for by starting the discussion thread.

- (20) I agree with your wife . When you made such comments , you are no better than him .  
Just eat humble pie lor, if you know that he is that type of person then so be it **bah**. Sometimes in life even the most irritating person that you encounter you may collaborate with him or cross paths with him again . Just don't burn bridges<sup>11</sup>

There does seem to be a certain degree of overlap of *bah* with some instances of *lah* and *leh*. As mentioned previously, *lah* comes in a variety of tones (Lim 2007) or lengths (Bell and Ser 1983) in Singlish, with meanings such as 'solidarity' and 'persuasion' (Ler 2005: 269–271) potentially approaching those of *bah*. It is arguably the case that an advice, such as those in the examples given above, is intended to persuade the addressee: Ler gives the example (taken from ICE-SIN-S1A-007) 'Go to Chinatown lah.' and glosses it with 'Why don't you?' (2005: 271).<sup>12</sup> *Bah* differs from *lah* in its narrower range of meanings and its more evident focus on uncertainty. This latter term, in fact, was used time and again in the comment option of the survey; furthermore, when presented with a choice of definitions of *bah*, 'uncertainty when giving advice' elicited a majority of choices from participants.

The particle *leh* also covers a wide range of meanings; as with *lah*, tone also plays a role. A low level tone indicates disagreement or conveys information assumed to be new, and a high level tone is equivalent to 'what about' (Platt 1987), exactly as in Cantonese (Lim 2007: 461). With a mid level tone, it can be an emphatic marker (Kwan-Terry 1991). Lim (2007) and Kwan-Terry (1991) also mention its use as a marker of certain question types. Finally, it has also been defined as 'tentative' by Gupta (1992) and Wee (2004). Of these rather diverging functions the ones concerned with tentativeness and 'what about' may approach those of *bah*. In order to successfully discriminate the finer points of their respective functions, two sentences were presented to survey respondents:

- (21) a. me and this gal are quite on good terms bah (from (1c) above)  
b. me and this gal are quite on good terms leh

When questioned if there was a difference between the two sentences in (21), 83% responded with yes. This figure alone (combined with a rather different spelling and pronunciation) might be enough to consider them separate particles in their own right; nonetheless, respondents were asked to justify why the two sentences were distinct. The 50 open-ended responses offer an insight into the different pragmatic functions of these two particles, with useful additional information on *bah*. Of these 50 responses, 9 mention the attribute 'uncertain' for *bah* and 7 mention 'certain' for *leh*. *Bah* also means 'unsure' for 9, while *leh* means 'sure' for 6. The remaining qualifiers cover a range of stances including, for *bah*, 'doubt', 'guessing', 'hesitation', 'unconfirmed', 'less confident than *leh*', 'one-sided affirmation', 'greater degree of uncertainty than *leh*'. For *leh*, we have 'confrontational', 'affirmative', 'positive', 'emphasis', 'attempt to convince' (twice), 'reinforcing', 'defensive'. One respondent disagrees with the writer's choice of particle, calling it 'not [...] appropriate [...] in

this case', and that they 'would use *one* or *leh*' instead. It appears, then, that changing the particle in (21) does in fact result in quite a substantial shift at a pragmatic level: the overlap potentially seen in definitions focussing on attenuation such as 'tentative' (Gupta 1992, Wee 2004) or 'what about' (Platt 1987) for *leh* and 'hesitation', 'uncertainty', and 'doubt' for *bah* does not do justice to the finer differences in pragmatic meaning that the particles fulfil.

If anything, the definitions gathered in the online survey tend to emphasise uncertainty and hedging. Also often mentioned was the property of *bah* to highlight the fact that the preceding proposition is the speaker/writer's opinion rather than a known fact. Finally, three respondents appropriately qualified the use of *bah* as a local phenomenon, making the sentence 'more "[S]ingaporean-like"', or it being 'just a local way of speaking'.

Summing up, the *bah* particle in Singlish carries the pragmatic meanings of uncertainty, non-commitment, and has a hedging effect when giving advice. There are similarities with its putative origin in Mandarin, although only in cases where it could be glossed by a tag question (as per Li & Thompson 1981). The example in (13a), reproduced here as (22a), shows the parallel perhaps best: rendering the statement in Singlish, as in (22b), conveys a slightly different pragmatic meaning, with the Mandarin 'tag question' garnering support for the proposition, and the Singlish *bah* reducing the force of the statement and marking it as being a personal opinion rather than a statement of fact.

- (22) a. Tā hěn hǎokàn ba.  
'S/He is very good looking, don't you agree?'
- b. He is very good looking bah.

#### *Bah and the class of particles in Singlish*

The question remains of how *bah* relates to the other, 'established' discourse particles of Singlish. The 'scale of assertiveness' presented in Gupta (1992: 37) offers a convenient way of classifying the particles on a continuum from maximally assertive to tentative (see Figure 1 in section 1.3). Given our discussion above, *bah*, carrying a tentative meaning, would ideally be situated between *hor* and *hah*, at the tentative end of the assertiveness continuum. While *hor* 'asserts and elicits support for a proposition' (Gupta 1992), the assertive dimension of *bah* is lesser. With regards to *hah*, Gupta mentions that it occurs in interrogatives, which increases its tentativeness rating, including vis-à-vis *bah*. It should, however, be noted that various authors give quite different definitions of these particles, with *leh*, as seen above, often rated as less assertive than by Gupta (1992). Wee (2004), for instance, who writes that *leh* marks a 'tentative suggestion or request', would probably situate it between *hor* ('assertive') and *hah* – meaning that in his typology, the tentative end of the assertiveness continuum in Figure 1 would begin at *ah*, and go through *hah*, *bah*, and then *leh*.

The ability to situate *bah* on Gupta's scale serves primarily to illustrate its membership of the class of discourse particles in Singlish. In this capacity, it follows the syntactical constraints of the other particles, but is also limited to the same sociolinguistic constraints Singlish discourse particles are subjected to: they only occur in reasonably informal speech, and would be precluded from a style where the

situational context demands that the standard should be used. The fact that three survey respondents assigned local indexical values to *bah* clearly illustrates this.

It is with regards to etymology that *bah* might set itself apart from other particles. As Lim (2007) makes abundantly clear, the discussion on the origin of particles has divided authors for decades, with multiple languages posited as their respective source. A common point, however, seems to be the conspicuous absence of Mandarin from these discussions. As is obvious from the sociolinguistic history of Singapore, Mandarin was not really involved in the founding phases of Singlish: the variety appeared in the 1920s as a medium of education in Chinese schools, which had hitherto used ‘dialects’, coinciding with the founding of the Republic of China (see Gupta 1994: 45, Lim 2007: 454). Lim points out that Mandarin would have been largely confined to formal settings, and Gupta writes that while ‘Mandarin can also not be ruled out as a minor influence’ on Singlish, it nonetheless ‘must take a back seat to Hokkien, Cantonese, and Malay’ (Gupta 1994: 45). She does add, however, that ‘it may be more important in future’, a point also raised by Lim (2007: 469–470). So while the number of speakers of Mandarin in Singapore must have been minute as late as the 1950s, this has certainly changed. With the advent of governmental language policy aimed at promoting the use of Mandarin, most famously through its Speak Mandarin Campaign initiated in 1979, knowledge and proficiency in the language spread beyond a minority in the Chinese ethnic group. The Mandarin language policy in Singapore, with its emphasis on the variety in the education system (where it is taught as a ‘mother tongue’ subject to ethnic Chinese, and counts for a quarter of the year’s mark) has had the effect of a drastic shift in home language use. At the very least, this is what official census data reports, data based on self-reporting the ‘language most often spoken at home’. These data have seen a massive surge of both Mandarin and English in recent decades, concurrent with a steep decline in non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese over the same period (see Table 2). The fact that Mandarin and English have now become the primary languages in the Chinese community (see e.g. Lim & Foley 2004: 6, Lim 2007: 456; Mandarin use rises to 47.7% in the Chinese ethnic group), coupled with this community’s majority status within Singapore (74.2% in June 2013), is likely to have an effect on the resulting form of the contact variety Singlish.

Table 2. Language most frequently spoken at home, in percent of the resident population.

	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>English</b>	11.6	18.8	23.0	32.3
<b>Mandarin</b>	10.2	23.7	35.0	35.6
<b>Other Chinese</b>	59.5	39.6	23.8	14.3
<b>Malay</b>	13.9	14.3	14.1	12.2
<b>Tamil</b>	3.1	2.9	3.2	3.3

The case for a Mandarin-to-Singlish transfer in the case of *ba/bah* is, therefore, more than possible. For one, the surface realisation is identical, even in tone, seeing as Mandarin *ba* carries the ‘neutral tone’, i.e., is atonal. The two are also syntactically identical, in that they are restricted to clause-final position, much like most other Mandarin or Singlish discourse particles. There are differences in semantics and pragmatics, as explored above and as for the other particles of Singlish (Lim 2007), yet the primary meanings of accommodation, advice, and, more

generally, tentativeness, are found in both particles, with a stronger emphasis on uncertainty in the case of Singlish *bah*. The fact that three survey respondents commented (without prompt) that *bah* was simply Mandarin 吧 may be either anecdotal folk etymology or a valid pointer on the part of linguistically aware bilinguals.

### CONCLUSION

The data presented document the existence of a particle *bah* in Colloquial Singapore English (Singlish). This particle is a member of the well-described Singlish discourse particle class, which includes the stereotypical *lah* as well as up to a dozen other particles used to convey a range of pragmatic meanings. The fact that *bah* has not previously been described has two explanations: firstly, it is a relatively low-frequency form, and this might also explain its absence from existing spoken corpora. Secondly, it is entirely possible that *bah* is a comparatively recent addition to the class of Singlish discourse particles. Lim (2007: 464–465) distinguishes two groups of particles: a first one comprising *ah*, *lah*, and *what*, which were documented as early as the 1970s, and a second one including all her other particles (*lor*, *hor*, *meh*, *mah*), which are given scholarly treatment beginning in the late 1980s. This implies a chronological grouping of the particles, with an older group and a younger one. She further argues that given the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic realities in Singapore at the time of the emergence of these two groups of particles, a Hokkien and/or Malay origin is likely for the first group (*ah*, *lah*, *what*), whereas Cantonese is a likely candidate for the second group, both on linguistic (phonetic and functional) grounds and on sociolinguistic grounds, considering that ‘their appearance can be seen to coincide with the burgeoning of Cantonese (pop) culture in the same period’ (Lim 2007: 466). The argument I make here is that a similar sociolinguistic process, namely the constant increase in the number of Singaporeans whose dominant home language or first additional language is Mandarin, can be held accountable for the emergence of linguistic variables in Singlish, such as the particle *bah*. The unprecedented shift towards the official language Mandarin, particularly pronounced among the younger generation is bound to have an impact on the variety of English also spoken by this demographic: Gupta (1994: 20) quotes Straits Times figures from 1990 showing 67.9% of primary school 1<sup>st</sup>-years of Chinese ethnicity using Mandarin as their ‘most frequently spoken home language’, and 90% of the 300 18 to 25-year-old participants in Siemund et al (2014: 352) have Mandarin in their repertoires. As a result, the class of discourse particles, which, as shown by Lim (2007), has proved itself open to new arrivals before, is likely to accept a candidate from the language that is now the most important one after English in the country. Mandarin *ba* presented itself, and, given the absence of an existing Singlish particle with the exact pragmatic meaning described above, was welcomed into Singlish to fill the gap.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://sgforums.com/forums/1390/topics/337215>

<sup>2</sup> Gupta is the only author to mention the particle *geh*.

<sup>3</sup> *Makan* 'to eat' in Malay as well as in Singlish.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thevoicewithin.net/facebook/mimi-facebook/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cantonese.sheik.co.uk/dictionary/examples/1381/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://sgforums.com/forums/8/topics/401108>

<sup>7</sup> <http://sgforums.com/forums/8/topics/399749>

<sup>8</sup> <http://sgforums.com/forums/8/topics/400091>

<sup>9</sup> <http://singaporemotherhood.com/forum/threads/1st-trimester-hungry-all-the-time.4573/page-2>

<sup>10</sup> <http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/hardware-clinic-2/going-get-comp-week-3935431.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://forums.hardwarezone.com.sg/eat-drink-man-woman-16/do-you-think-i-being-mean-3995809.html>

<sup>12</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion that *bah* might in fact be a phonetically modified form of *lah*. While I disagree with and hope to have refuted the reviewer's view of an extensive overlap between the two particles' functions, the proposal that *bah* might be the result of a sound shift from *lah* warrants more attention. A phonological change /#l/ > /#b/ is, in my view, extremely unlikely. Cantonese is famously undergoing a sound change where /n/ is becoming /l/ in initial position (e.g. 你 *nei5* > *lei5* 'you.SG', see inter alia Yip & Matthews 2001: 3–4), but /#l/ > /#b/ is, to my knowledge, unattested and articulatorily highly unlikely: while in the case of /n/ > /l/ the place of articulation, voicing, and continuancy remain the same, this is not true for \*/l/ > /b/, where an alveolar continuant becomes a bilabial plosive. The criticism could be more successfully levelled at the written nature of the data in this article, but even taking into account the highly variable quality of spelling in CMC (and more so when considering Singlish discourse particles, which do not have standardised spellings), substituting <b> for <l> seems, again, unlikely in the extreme: the two keys on any standard keyboard are not close to each other, the grapheme-phoneme correspondence is solid (initial <b> = /b/ and /l/ = [l] in English, Malay, and Pinyin), and there is no economic, visual, or stylistic reason for the substitution. The existence of written *bah* in the online data must, therefore, be grounded in a phonetic form used in spoken language as something like [ba:].

**APPENDIX A: GLOWBE-SG BAH KWIC-LIST**

205	SG G	...icalben.blogspot.com	buy instead . So bring 4 sets will be good enough bah hahaha ! # Do n't need to miss me k , cause
224	SG G	sgforums.com	he is paying full cash lor ..... # it actually depends bah if the family always go gym and swimming then got condo also
602	SG G	...gqiuqiu.blogspot.com	harshly . Maybe you two are n't meant to be friends bah ) : That 's my opinion on this issue , but anw
604	SG G	sgforums.com	go gym and swimming then got condo also quite worth it bah + friving in hdb you pay the parkign fee already 90 per
612	SG G	sgforums.com	btw. guess many ppl will say dun complain and just go bah , bt kinda dun want to waste time again in tekong. summore
614	SG B	flowerpod.com.sg (1)	, but not uncomfortable . You can check with doctor bah , but I feel it should be safe enough . # what
648	SG G	...icalben.blogspot.com	# Most likely is just to the nearby areas of Taipei bah , where we do n't have to spend so much time travelling
659	SG G	...gaporemotherhood.com	v v v heavy also !! So means it normal ba . But 2nd af did n't come cos I bfp . Then
662	SG G	forums.playpark.net	. So just find some time and to go attempt it ba . However , do gain some experience in downing Czak in parties
666	SG G	dramabeans.com	and all now but that lady deserves so much better , bah . I can live with the chicken shop , but not with
675	SG G	mummysg.com	first time MTB . I'll pop by my GP first bah . Pardon me , what is folic acid for ? Re
676	SG G	....hardwarezone.com.sg	i think be prepared to set aside at least 1-2 hours bah . Price difference depends on your bargaining skills and
679	SG G	....hardwarezone.com.sg	that he is that type of person then so be it bah . Sometimes in life even the most irritating person that you
681	SG G	...gqiuqiu.blogspot.com (1)	getting , or finding something , then you look within ba . Stop look outwards . That's all i 'd say ,
686	SG G	...gqiuqiu.blogspot.com	Wuhoo .. = (" THEN YOU READ THIS AGAIN BA . # By the way , YOUNG is not an excuse to
692	SG B	fujiiwarayukino.com	around the convention . Emm .. mm .. maybe next time bah . # The Media Behind the Scene Here I am at the

694	SG G	tremeritus.com	. We Singaporeans know its not true so stop kidding ourselves bah . # This is bullshit . Will Knight Frank (whose business
696	SG G	fairplay.garena.com	setup moderated rooms so we .. feel like banning then ban bah .. do n't feel like it then do n't ban bah ..
697	SG G	kiasuparents.com	a part in reminding all the students to remind their parents bah .. hehee .. # " For P1 , he could choose any
698	SG G	fairplay.garena.com	bah .. do n't feel like it then do n't ban bah .. I do n't like his face then I ban .. I
699	SG G	flowerpod.com.sg	starting part , maybe try to change ur room outfit again ba .. like i just chnaged mine which its a good start over
700	SG G	flowerpod.com.sg	on top below is the silver uv protection ... looks cute ba .. who actually termed women carrying umbrellas under the hot
701	SG G	...gaporemotherhood.com	meals .. feel bloated aft tat .. think this is normal bah .. # haha , I felt excited too during my 1st visit
702	SG G	...gqiuqiu.blogspot.com	she's the victim . Leave her in her own world ba .. # Hey QiuQiu ! I was so surprised to see this
705	SG G	asianfanatics.net	everyone does ... i was abit nervous wen i did mine buh ... our talk was spose to be for 5 mins roughly and
707	SG G	...wlers.forumotion.com	thinking whether to cut and hinge the door ... maybe not ba ... since it 's gon na be an open top ... might
711	SG G	donnadaritan.com	that 's not me ... that is ... erm .... spookyyy bah ... # Pause : 1 . to make a pause ; be
712	SG G	perfectweddings.sg	intentions , it oso depends on the other party 's beliefs ba ... # we 'll be attending our good friend 's wedding on
684	SG B	...ianbee.wordpress.com	it ah ? # Me : I think should be upstairs bah . We go up and see lah ? # June : ?

## APPENDIX B: ONLINE USAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

1a. Read the conversation below and tick all options that apply.

A: Hi guys,

Is it possible to change our surnames here in sg since we can change our first names too? Many chinese and koreans in Japan done that, feel that since sg is not japan there will be less hassle and more freedom

B: should be deed poll ba

even people whose surname is from dialect (eg. Teo) want to change officially to (eg. Zhang) also must deed poll

Source: <http://sgforums.com/forums/8/topics/401108>

- The second writer uses “ba” because he/she is confident that a deed poll will work
- The second writer uses “ba” because he/she is not sure if a deed poll will work
- The second writer uses “ba” because he/she to encourage the previous poster to try a deed poll
- The “ba” at the end of the sentence makes that sentence more polite.
- None of the above
- Do you have other comments on “ba” in this example?

1b. Would you personally use “ba” as in this example?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2a. Read the conversation below and tick all the options that apply.

dun noe wad she is thinking

for me, me and this gal are quite on good terms bah, she can tell me alot of her stuffs, and open up to me. she did fulfil to the promises she make to me.

even went out together accmpy her to shopping, she suggest. She claims she is very happy going out wif me.

Source: <http://sgforums.com/forums/1390/topics/337215>

- Because the writer uses “bah”, his point is that he and his girlfriend are on excellent terms.
- Because the writer uses "bah", he is saying that he and his girlfriend are usually on good terms, but that this is not always the case.
- By using “bah” here, the writer wants to soften a criticism of the girlfriend that he will make later.
- The writer could have used “lah” instead of “bah” and the sentence would mean the same thing.
- None of the above
- Do you have other comments on “bah” in this example?

2b. Would you personally use “bah” as in this example?

- Yes

- No
- Don't know

2c. Is there a difference between the sentence “me and this gal are quite on good terms bah” and the sentence “me and this gal are quite on good terms leh”?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2d. If yes, what is the difference?

3a. Read the conversation below and tick all options that apply.

A: For fun, mates:  
What pisses you off the most?  
Leave your interesting comments and responses below!

B: when someone keep disturbing u

C: Everything !

D: People who refused to understand your explanation.....

E: subjective ba...  
ppl are entitled to different view and opinion ma...

Source: <http://sgforums.com/forums/8/topics/399749>

- The “ba” used in the last comment expresses frustration.
- The “ba” used in the last comment expresses anger.
- The “ba” used in the last comment expresses confidence.
- The “ba” used in the last comment expresses uncertainty.
- The “ba” used in the last comment makes the sentence more polite.
- The “ba” used in the last comment makes the sentence less committed.
- None of the above
- Do you have other comments on “ba” in this example?

3b. Would you personally use “ba” as in this example?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

4a. Read the conversation below and tick all options that apply.

A: any mummies experiencing weight gain? how's your progress?  
i went to my gynae's on monday and found I only gained 1 kg in this 1 month! I'm 50kg now which is a normal weight for my size.  
i'm now almost 18 weeks, but my gynae says the growth is normal so not to worry!

B: Haha.. I am 17Wk 4D.. I gained also about a kg too.. Think this is normal bah, coz I did a search online, saw some gals did not gain weight at all, and the

tummy also never shown. So.. As long the gynae scan shown baby is growing, then should be fine. But continue taking healthy food.

Source: <http://www.mummysg.com/forums/f171/edd-feb-2012-a-66499/index9.html>

- The second writer uses “bah” here because she is convinced this is normal.
- The second writer uses “bah” here because she does not think this is normal.
- The second writer uses “bah” here because she it makes the sentence more polite.
- The “bah” used here turns the sentence into a suggestion.
- The “bah” used here shows that the second writer is unsure.
- The second writer uses “bah” here because she does not care if it is normal or not.
- None of the above
- Do you have other comments on “bah” in this example?

4b. Would you personally use “bah” as in this example?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

5. Final question: how would you describe the word bah? More than one answer is possible.

- It marks a suggestion.
- It marks a question.
- It adds politeness.
- It marks uncertainty when giving advice.
- It reduces the force of the sentence.
- It asks for support.
- It always marks uncertainty.
- It makes a request more forceful.
- It decreases commitment.
- Provide your own definition:

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