

Constraint Reality: Linguistic Expressions of Restrictivity and Emotive Stances
A Discourse-Pragmatic Study of Utterance-Final *Lāh* in Shishan (Hainan Island, China)

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Abstract

Based on natural conversational data, the current study analyzes utterance-final pragmatic particle *lāh* in Shishan, a dialect of Lingao of the Tai-Kadai language family. The research proposes that *lāh* signals an interactively built, relational notion of restrictivity. Specifically, *lāh* signals to the addressee that the state-of-affairs described in the utterance is restricted such that “nothing else” is possible due to a pre-existing, external constraint. The core meaning of relational “nothing else” gives rise to such pragmatic extensions as marking suggestions necessitated by external circumstances, assertion of “obviousness,” negative politeness strategies, and various emotive stances toward the situation in focus and/or toward the addressee.

The range of functions of *lāh* parallel a number of Southeast Asian languages’ pragmatic particles (e.g. Cantonese *lo*, Mandarin *me*, Singapore English *lor*), particularly surrounding the function of marking the propositional content as “obvious.” The overlap corroborates a recurrent theme in the expanding research on pragmatic particles, specifically, pragmatic particles’ encoding the speaker’s subjectivity toward the content being communicated. Equally important is that their use is prompted by, and in turn, responds to, perceived sharedness/divergence in the speaker’s and addressee’s subjective understandings of the world, an embodiment of the “intersubjective” nature of language.

Word Count: 196

Keywords: *pragmatic particles, stance, Tai-Kadai, Lingao, restrictivity, subjectivity*

1. Introduction

Pragmatic particles, variably called discourse markers or discourse particles (Aijmer, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987), modal particles (Chappell, 1991), interactional particles (Maynard, 1993), utterance-particles (Luke, 1990; Wu, 2004), and sentence particles (Li and Thompson, 1981), form a unique, arguably, universal, class of words.¹ Pragmatic particles across diverse languages are broadly comparable in their ability to accomplish a complex range of interactional functions and convey speakers' nuanced stances *vis-à-vis* the propositional content of the utterance, toward the addressee, and other elements of the interactional context.² Occurring pervasively in natural discourse, pragmatic particles also play a significant role in creating and maintaining textual cohesion, highlighting discourse relationships, facilitating conversational tasks, and, on the more macro-levels, indexing sociocultural identities.³

Augmenting this growing body of research, the current study is a discourse-pragmatic analysis of an utterance-final pragmatic particle, namely *lāh*, in a less commonly studied language, Shishan, a dialect of Lingao of the Tai-Kadai language family, spoken on northern Hainan Island, Southern China.

Drawing on dyadic and multiple-party conversational data, the study argues that *lāh* signals an interactively built, relational notion of “restrictivity,” i.e. *lāh* marks the state-of-affairs, described by the utterance, as being restricted such that “nothing else” is possible due to a pre-existing, external constraint.⁴ Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the proposed meaning of *lāh*.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

As a pragmatic/interactional particle, *lāh*'s assertion of restrictivity is both interactively motivated and interactively intended. That is, elements in the discourse and interactional context, which indicate a different orientation toward the facts and realities on the part of the addressee, prompt the particle's employment (cf. Strauss and Xiang, 2009; Xiang, 2009). In turn, the use of *lāh* addresses the speaker's/addressee's perspective differentials.

The relational notion of "restrictivity" gives rise to various epistemic expressions (e.g. "obviousness," commonsense), emotive expressions (e.g., resignation, resolve, regret, indignation), and other contextualized senses and speakers' stances. Also facilitated are such interactional functions as correcting the addressee's false assumptions/expectations, making suggestions through epistemic and logical appeal, underscoring an interrogative act with senses of urgency, among others.

This range of senses and functions parallel a number of pragmatic particles in Southeast Asian languages: Cantonese *lo* (Luke, 1990; Matthews and Yip, 1994), Mandarin *me* (Chappell, 1991; Chu, 1998), and Singapore English *lor* (Gupta, 1992; Platt and Ho, 1989; Wee, 2002). Research on these particles noted the pragmatic marking of "obviousness," a "resignative" stance, and relational meanings (e.g. "cause-effect"), but none of these studies related these meanings and functions to the notion of restrictivity. The current research argues that, with regard to Shishan *lāh*, the sense of "obviousness," as well as other functions (discourse, emotive, and epistemic, alike), derive from the central relational notion of restrictivity: a subjective representation of a "constraint reality" where nothing else is possible.

2. Restrictivity: Linguistic Encoding of Constraint Reality

The marking of restrictivity in general, and the marking of “nothing else” in particular, is not an uncommon functional category among languages. The so-called “restrictives” and “exclusives,” such as English “just” and “only,” focus on a particular aspect of a situation, excluding other potential candidates and choices (Quirk et al., 1985, 261-262; 380). Aijmer (2002) considered “just” to be an “interpersonal particle,” which presents a linguistic focus on a selective aspect of a situation, as (1) illustrates:

(1) Restrictive Marking of English “just” (Aijmer, 2002: 155, #4)

b: you got a cold

a: no, **just** a bit sniffy. Cos I’m- I am cold and I’ll be all right once I’ve warmed up.

Aijmer (2002) suggested that the “restrictive” use of “just” excludes other considerations or interpretations. As such, the speaker may resort to the particle as a negative politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987), which downplays the face-threatening nature of suggestions or criticisms, as in “I’m just wondering...,” and “I was just thinking...”

(Aijmer, 2002: 173). This usage seems parallel to Cantonese final particle, *jēk* (*jē*), which signals a meaning of restriction and accomplishes “delimiting, diminutive, or downplaying functions” (Chan, 1996:14), as in *Yat cheung nghwuih jē* ‘It’s just a case of misunderstanding’ (Chan, 1996: 13).

Another example of the linguistic representation of restriction, in the form of restriction of choices, appears in Korean particles *lato*, *na*, and *man*, which encode choices or the consequence of a lack of choice, as well as correcting false assumptions (Lee, 1993). According to Lee, *lato* encodes a choice that is not the speaker’s primary option but the only one available in the specified circumstance (Lee, 1993: 60). *Na*

signals a similar unattainability of the speaker's first choice, but it selects an entity as the second best among all available options (Lee, 1993: 78). *Man* pertains to a gap in expectation between the speaker and the interlocutor; whereby, through the use of *man*, the speaker restricts the scope of the interlocutor's expectation. The triplet in (2) is a contrastive illustration.

(2) Three Choice Particles in Korean (Lee, 1993)

- a. *lato* (Lee, 1993: 60, #2)
 A: *pap com cwuseyyo*.
 Give me some rice
 B: *ramyen ppakkey epseyo*.
 There's only ramyen.
 A: *ramyenilato cwuseyyo*.
 Give me **even ramyen** (even if it is ramyen, I'll take it.) [LAST CHOICE]
- b. *na* (Lee, 1993: 78, #2)
 A: *Soli epsumyen ettehkey halkayo?*
 If the Sol brand is **not available**, what shall I do?
 B: *Arirangina han kap saonela*.
 Buy me **a pack of Arirang**. [SECOND BEST CHOICE]
- c. *man* (Lee, 1993: 69, #1)
 A: *yocuumto hankwukewa ilponelul kongpuhasipnikka?*
 Are you still studying **Korean and Japanese**?
 B: *aniyo, hankukeman kongpuhapnita*.
 No, I'm studying **only Korean**. [TO LIMIT EXPECTATION]

Such linguistic coding of restriction and limitation of choices plausibly corresponds to common experiences and decision-making processes in everyday activities, in which restrictions often limit the range of one's choice/extent of action despite one's preference and desire (i.e. what Chappell calls the "realis and irrealis oppositions" Chappell, 1991: 40).

In the case of Shishan *lāh*, however, the restrictive notion of “nothing else” is concomitant with the evocation of an external factor acting as constraint on the state-of-affairs in focus, providing logical and epistemological basis for negating all other possibilities. Example (3), an invented exchange, provides a preliminary illustration:

(3) A Teahouse Scenario (invented)

((The waiter is showing a customer an assortment of snack choices, including the teahouse’s signature snack, *baochi* “stuffed bun.”))

1 Waiter: *áo dānggēi?*
bring what
‘What (would you) like (among these snack choices)?’

2a Customer: *bāoqí*
bun
‘Stuffed buns.’ [No particle, to inform plainly]

vs.

→2b Customer: *bāoqí lāh.*
bun LĀH
‘Stuffed buns (of course).’ [My choice= *bāoqí* ‘stuff buns,’
Nothing else is considered **since buns are your signature snack.**]

In responding to the waiter’s question regarding the customer’s preferred snack, the customer may indicate a preference plainly without using any final particles (in Line 2a).⁵ The customer may choose to express an assertive overtone by using *lāh* (Line 2b); in that case, the speaker not only indicates a preference, but also marks the choice as the only one to be considered, evoking the mutually known celebrated status of the chosen snack. The overtone couples with a sense that the food choice is “obvious,” captured felicitously by the English phrase, “of course,” in the translation.

The following segment, from naturally occurring data, provides an additional preliminary illustration. This segment occurs between two female friends, M and S, who are discussing the lottery.

(4) [The Convenience Store]

((The lottery number contains four digits. Previously, B has learned from a lottery expert that the sum of the four digits in the lottery number should be small to win. In addition, the lottery number most likely contains the two digits, 3 and 9.))

1 B: *dā[^]m gǎo bēng mǒ yín kìm lén dle-dlǎo jiā[^]ng ée.↑*
 3 9 two CLS complete must return get -reach lottery PRT
 ‘**The two (digits), 3 and 9**, must be (in the number) (in order to) win the lottery!’

→2 M: *dām gǎo bēng mǒ de::: dlì áo[^]::: dām mǒ ló lā :::h.*
 3 9 two CLS COP M bring 3 CLS into PRT
 ‘(If it is to choose between) **the two (digits), 3 and 9, of course (one) should choose 3** (9 is beyond consideration).’

[Choices of lottery number digits=limited to 3, excluding 9, on the basis of expert’s prediction that the total sum of the four digits of the lottery be small.]

While contemplating the lottery expert’s predictions, M uses *lāh* to mark the digit, 3, as the sole choice; whereby, the digit, 9, is beyond consideration. Asserting the choice to be 3, excluding 9, evokes the known prediction by the lottery expert that the sum of the digits in the lottery number should be small. Again, the expression, “of course,” in the translation captures the self-assured assertiveness of the speaker *vis-à-vis* the restricted nature of the affairs of concern.

The relational notion of restrictivity (i.e. “nothing else” due to external constraint) not only concerns choices, but also addresses various types of discursive contexts in which the speaker reduces the choices to one entity/aspect/interpretation of a situation. A collection of excerpts from the current data provides further illustration:

(5) Three examples of *lāh*

a. [The Noodle Restaurant]

((K and Z, both males in their 20s, are talking about their elementary school classmate, Fēng. Fēng is female, married, with two children.))

1K: *hūk dānggēi rólh ǎydēi nì á?*
do what at now PRT PRT
'What (does Fēng) do (for a living) now?'

→2Z: *gě ah hūk dānggēi? Nā kào Sè -Fāng lāh.*
3SG also do what only rely:on Sè -Fāng LĀH
'What does she do (for a living)? (Rhetorical question=she can't do anything else for a living) (She) **just relies on Sè -Fāng** (=Fēng's husband).'

→3 *kào Sè -Fāng kuai xiá de pǎh lāh.*
rely:on Sè -Fāng drive car COP cease LĀH
'(She can do nothing) but **rely on Sè -Fāng (who) drives the cab (=a motorcycle); that's it.**'

Fēng's means of making a living=dependence on husband, no other means

b. [The Convenience Store]

((This segment occurs after exchanges of greeting between M and O; M=a chef and restaurant-owner; O=a farmer. Both are female.))

1 M: *dūn bēng rólh he mì bēi né?*
stroll rest at here PRT go where
'Are you strolling around or are you going somewhere?'

→2 O: *dūn bēng lāh. Bēi né?*
stroll rest LĀH go where
'(I am just) **strolling around. Where (am I) going?** (rhetorical question=I'm not going anywhere.)'
...((Two turns by M and O, respectively, omitted, in which M invites O to chat.))

3 O: *dōu hūk gōng, n huán hě,*
2PL do labor NEG free ever
'You guys have a job and are never free.'

4 *dōu nǎ en mēng huán shuǎn vēi di, dōu hūk shuǎn vēi .*
1PL DEM PL have free whole year PRT 2PL do whole year
'People like us (farmers) idle all year around; you guys work all year around.'
O's current engagement=[restricted to] strolling around, no other possibilities

c. [The Duck Vendor]

((C41 responds to the roast duck vendor who tries to add more meat to the scale.))

1 VR: *n dlǒng, n dlǒng dā gōn lǒu* .((Switching Hainanese)) *Vǒ gāo* .
 NEG reach NEG reach half pound PRT NEG enough
 ‘Not yet. **(It’s) not even half a pound.** ((Hainanese)) (It’s) not enough.’

2 C41: *áo liǎo guā?*
 bring much why
 ‘What’s the point of adding more? (=It’s pointless to add more.)’

→3 *sè? giuliǎo de giuliǎo lāh.*
 money how:much COP how:much LĀH
 ‘**However much it is worth (on the scale) is however much it is worth (no more).**’

C41’s purchase= [limited to] the amount of meat on the scale, no more

Lāh appears in (5a) and (5b) to answer the interlocutor’s questions, and in (5c), to

respond to the meat vendor’s presumptuous behavior, summarized as:

(5a) → Fēng has no means of making a living other than relying on her husband.

(5b) → O is engaged in no activity other than simply strolling around.

(5c) → The amount of meat currently being weighed on the scale is the amount the speaker wants to buy, no more.

All three usages co-occur with rhetorical questions (in the second line of all three examples), e.g. *Gě ah hūk dānggēi?* ‘What does she do? =she does nothing else except relying on her husband,’ reinforcing the notion of restrictivity.

Emotive stances are also apparent in all three instances. In (5a), the emphatic particles of exclusivity, *nā* ‘only’ and *pǎh* ‘to cease,’ a verb phrase of non-agentivity, *kào* ‘rely: on,’ and the shared understanding that driving a motorcycle cab provides a meager income, render the situation deplorable. Similarly, in (5b), the speaker relates current idleness to the external constraint that she is a farmer, who, compared to jobholders such

as M, has no other choice but to be idle all year. The speaker contrasts her state of idleness with M's alleged state of job security through emphasis, hyperbole (e.g. *n huán hě* '[you are] not free ever'; *shuǎn vēi* 'all year around'), and parallel structure which positions the speaker and the addressee in opposite situations. The speaker in (5c) expresses impatience toward the vendor's attempt to sell more meat, through the corroboration of *lāh*, the rhetorical question (Line 2) and the tautological construction (Line 3).

This preliminary illustration foretells the main thrusts of the current research: to illustrate the core meaning of *lāh* through discursive evidence, the mechanisms through which the core meaning gives rise to a variety of speakers' stances, and pragmatic functions. The sections accomplishing these topics are:

First is a brief description of Shishan dialect (Section 3), followed by a description of the data and methodology employed for the study (Section 4). Section 5 is the analysis, which begins with an overview of the discourse distribution of *lāh* followed by five sub-sections: Section 5.1 analyzes *lāh* in declarative utterances, establishing the central argument. Section 5.2 explicates the relational nature of *lāh*. Section 5.3 explicates the mechanisms through which *lāh* marks emotive stances, followed by analysis of *lāh* in facilitating utterances of suggestions and resolution (Section 5.4), and interrogative utterances (Section 5.5).⁶ Section 6 functions as both discussion and extension of the main argument. That section compares *lāh* to particles of other Southeast Asian languages by focusing on the common functions of asserting "obviousness" and signaling a negative emotive stance (e.g. resignation). These particles also parallel in the function of giving advice/suggestions through citation of pre-existing circumstances.

Section 7, the last section, discusses the findings in relation to the (inter)subjective and cultural basis of language.

3. Shishan Dialect

Shishan is a language spoken in Shishan Town and adjacent areas in northern Hainan Island, China (approx. 70,000-80,000 speakers). The inhabitants of Hainan speak a variety of Chinese and non-Chinese languages (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese [a southern Min dialect], Lingao, Miao, among others [Hashimoto, 1980; He and Huang, 1988; Liang and Zhang, 1997; Liu, 2000; Ruan et al., 1994; Zhang et al., 1984]). One of the major non-Chinese languages spoken in Hainan is Lingao, a language of the Tai-Kadai language family, with more than 500,000 speakers (Grimes, 2000: 415; He and Huang, 1988; Liang and Zhang, 1997; Liu, 2000; Ruan et al., 1994; Zhang et al., 1984). Various Lingao studies and documents briefly mention Shishan as a regional dialectal variation of Lingao (He and Huang, 1988; Liang and Zhang, 1997; Liu, 2000; Ruan et al., 1994; Zhang et al., 1984). Shishan has no formal documentation, nor does it exist in written form (a more detailed description of the sociolinguistic context of Shishan appears in Xiang, 2006).

Shishan is an SVO, tonal language with monosyllabic morphemes; similar to other Southeast Asian languages, particles are a salient typological feature of Shishan, affecting tense/aspect, sentence mood, and modality, among other grammatical categories. Utterance-final particles occur in abundance in Shishan and accomplish a diverse range of pragmatic and interactional functions.⁷

4. Data and Methodology

The data for this study consist of six-hours of naturally occurring conversation (yielding approximately 23,540 words of transcription). The six-hours of data are a subset of a 60-hour corpus of data, collected in Shishan Town, in the summer of 2002. The data collection occurred at six private business locations in Shishan, including a hair salon, a dressmaker's shop, a roast duck vendor's stand, a convenience store, a noodle restaurant, and a fruit vendor's stall. The current data represent the first hour from each data collection site. These business' locations serve the dual-functions of venues for business transactions and socializing among local residents. Thus, the data yield a range of colloquial spoken genres (e.g. service-encounters, reporting, story-telling, gossip, etc.).

Romanization of the Shishan data is according to the Pinyin system, the official romanization system developed for Mandarin Chinese in China (cf. Li and Thompson, 1981:XVI). Modifications accommodate sounds that are particular to Shishan, including consonant clusters (e.g., *dlóng* 'to reach,' *dlōu* 'we'); final consonants and final aspiration (e.g., *rāh* 'home,' *dām* 'three') and triphthongs (e.g. *luéi* 'long'). Indications of tones use diacritic tone marks (see Appendix A for the tone notation system adopted in the Romanization of Shishan in this study).⁸

The data transcription follows a modified version of Conversation Analysis (CA) transcription conventions (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). The CA conventions visually depict the paralinguistic features of the delivery of speech (e.g., pauses, restarts, sound stretches, overlapping speech) (see Appendix B for a list of abbreviations and Appendix C for complete transcription notation).

Analytical considerations focus on issues of semantics and pragmatics. All tokens of *lāh* are isolated, frequencies counted, and utterance types and sequential positions coded. Analytical considerations appeal to discourse distribution, utterance-types, turn-by-turn analysis of particularly revealing sequences, as well as instances of *lāh* vs. non-use of *lāh* in analytically comparable sequences of conversation. Attention also focuses on co-occurrences of *lāh* with other linguistic forms of restrictivity, such as rhetorical questions, tautological construction, and other restrictivity/exclusivity-marking particles.

5. Analysis⁹

Overall, 139 tokens of *lāh*, as a separate particle, occur in the data, all at the utterance-final position.¹⁰ Table 1 summarizes the frequency of *lāh*, calculated by the number of words per *lāh*-token.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Averaging one *lāh*-token every 174 words, *lāh* is apparently a high frequency word in ordinary conversation, typical of pragmatic particles in general (cf. Chappell, 1991; Luke, 1990).¹¹

Among these 139 tokens, *lāh* occurs predominantly in declarative utterances (105 of the total 139, 75.5%), much less in exclamatory utterances (14 tokens, 10.1%), suggestion/resolution utterances (12 tokens, 8.6%), and interrogatives (8 tokens, 5.8%).

Further, the majority of *lāh*-tokens (100 of the total 139, 71.9%) occur in a responsive position, constituting part of the speaker's immediate response to the interlocutor's preceding utterance (e.g. answer to question, acknowledgement to compliment, etc., Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). The tokens of *lāh* that do not

occur in the responsive position occur either in elaborated narratives about past events or pertaining to a third party (Chafe, 1994), as exclamatory responses to physical elements of the conversational context (cf. “Response Cry,” Goffman, 1967), or the speaker’s initiation for resuming a topic previously discussed. Table 2 summarizes the discourse distribution of *lāh* in terms of utterance types and the token’s discourse distribution in responsive turns vs. first-positions.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The facts that 75.5% of all *lāh*-tokens occur in declarative utterances, and 71.9% of all *lāh*-tokens constitute part of a turn in immediate response to the prior speaker’s utterance, support the general observation that the nature of *lāh* is assertive, has a tone of certainty, and responds to addressees’ different views and orientations to facts/reality.

Nevertheless, observing that *lāh* is assertive in tone does not describe the semantic and pragmatic properties that are particular to *lāh*, although the characteristics do identify *lāh* with other particles that have similar strength of assertiveness. Indeed, research on pragmatic particles, particularly utterance-final particles in Southeast Asian languages, has well established the notion that pragmatic particles express speakers’ varying degrees of conviction or commitment to the propositional content of the utterance. This function is comparable to “epistemic modality” typically associated with English modal verbs (cf. Bybee et al., 1994; Palmer, 1986).

Similarly, the interactive nature of *lāh* is not surprising. Abundant research shows that, broadly speaking, elements of the interactional context (particularly beliefs and thoughts on the part of the addressee as evinced in prior discourse) prompt the use of pragmatic particles. In turn, the speaker uses particular particles to respond to such

“online” observations (see, for example, Shishan *ey* [Strauss and Xiang, 2009]), Cantonese *wo* [Luke, 1990], Mandarin Chinese *ou* [Wu, 2004]¹²). In this regard, pragmatic particles instantiate what Givón (2005) calls the “fine-tuned sensitivity on the part of speakers to the informational and social reality around them, most conspicuously to the constant shifting epistemic and deontic states of their interlocutors” (Givón, 2005: 177).

Thus, observing that *lāh* is assertive (rather than tentative or inquisitive, etc.), and interactively built, pinpoints the general nature of the particle, but does not fully account for its semantic/pragmatic properties, particularly relating to how such properties enable the particle to facilitate specific interactive functions. Subsequent sections elaborate the argument that central to *lāh* is a relational notion of restrictivity (i.e. “nothing else” due to a pre-existing, external condition). This central concept leads to derivation of various pragmatic and interactional functions.

5.1. “Nothing Else”: A Relational Notion of Restrictivity

Overall, in the 139 tokens of *lāh*, as many as 44 tokens (31.7%) co-occur with other emphatic markers/constructions of restrictive functions. Such markers of exclusivity and restrictivity include: *nā* ‘only’ and *de pǎh* ‘lit COP +to cease=that’s it.’ (Example 5a), rhetorical questions (e.g., *Gě ah hūk dānggēi?* ‘What [else can] she do?’ [Example 5a; also in 5b and 5c]), and tautology sentence construction (i.e., A is A, [Example 5c]). Other similar markers, enhancing the emphatic restrictivity assertion, include: simplicity marker, *gānsuì* ‘simply’; markers of completion, *yín* ‘totally, completely’; *chūn* ‘in the whole’; *shuǎnbu* ‘entirely’; superlative marker *zui*; intensifiers

jiābǎi ‘really,’ *nagū* ‘truly, really’; markers of absolute certainty, *kì* ‘must.’ Table 3 lists the number of occurrences of these collocating markers/constructions, with representative examples.

INSERT TABLE 3 BELOW

As Table 3 shows, nearly one third of all *lāh*-tokens co-occur with various emphatic markers and constructions, the majority of which are restrictivity/exclusivity markers/ constructions. This discourse patterning supports the argument that *lāh* is an emphatic marker of restrictivity, attracting constructions of similar semantic/pragmatic properties. However, another reasonable interpretation of the discourse skewing would be that these collocating restrictivity constructions contribute to the sense of restrictivity noted with *lāh*-utterances, rather than restrictivity being encoded in *lāh*. To clarify the argument, the ensuing Example (6) examines a case of *lāh* in the absence of these collocations; the meaning of restrictivity remains despite the absence of other restrictivity constructions/particles. The example provides clarification that the restrictivity meaning of *lāh* attracts an agglomeration of like constructions.

The context of the segment in Example (6) is that BC, the noodle restaurant owner, is asking K about life in the US. K is a native of Shishan, pursuing his graduate study in the US and was visiting Shishan during the time of the recording. In this segment, BC conjectures that farmers in the US live a better life than farmers in China and seeks K’s confirmation. K nevertheless counters this assumption, asserting that farmers in the US are as poor, a reality that has no other possibilities.

(6) [Noodle Restaurant]

1 BC: *gǒ gě bēi en dēwā nǒngmí n-*
 thing 3SG DEM PL life farmer
 ‘Over there (in the US) the farmers’ life-’

2 *dēwā gēi dlì mǎn guā dǐ -dōu rǎnggēi di ér?*
 life type M good pass here-place how/what PRT PRT
 ‘Their life must be better than ours here, isn’t it?’

→3K: *nǒngmín, nǒngmín ah::- (.) bēi en ah de giǎng lāh.*
 farmer farmer also DEM PL also COP poor LĀH
 ‘Farmers, farmers there also- (they) over there **are as poor.**’
 [Farmer=poor, no other possibility]

4 BC: *ah giǎng ó?*
 also poor PRT
 ‘As poor? (I’m surprised.)’

→5K: *ah de duōyí ról dèihuī - gě mō ah de gǒ giǎng lāh*
 also COP belong at society 3SG CLS also COP thing poor LĀH
 ‘(They) also belong to the society (of)- those people **are the poor people**
 (They can’t be not poor.)’

6 *bēi dlóng né nǒngmín n giǎng?*
 go reach where farmer NEG poor
 ‘Where (does one go to find) farmers not poor? (Farmers are poor no
 matter where they are.)’

BC’s assumption, stated in Line 1, has the construction of an affirmative statement followed by a question tag, *er*, for confirmation. Countering BC’s assumption, K informs BC that US farmers are poor, marked with *lāh*, negating all other possibilities (Line 3).

BC nevertheless registers K’s correction with a sense of disbelief (the question particle, *o*, expresses unexpectedness and surprise [Xiang, 2006]). This surprised stance prompts K to provide a lengthy explanation that states the constraining factor. K evokes the canonical understanding that farmers invariably belong to the lower socioeconomic class in their respective societies (Line 5) (i.e., *duōyí ról dèihuī* ... ‘belong to society [stratum]...’, and *gǒ giǎng* ‘the poor thing [=poor people]’). The jargon used (e.g. *duōyí* ‘to belong to’; *ról dèihuī* ‘in society’) and the modification of the initial ascriptive adjectival predicate (...*de giǎng* ‘[farmers] are poor’) (Line 3) to a nominal predicate

(...*de gǒ giǎng* ‘[farmers] are those poor things [=poor people],’ present the external constraint as a given condition that limits farmers’ socioeconomic status. K’s re-assertion of his view ends in a highly emphatic rhetorical question in Line 6, re-enforcing “nothing else.” Through these means, the restricted state-of-affairs is firmly established: Perhaps unthinkable, farmers in the US are restricted to the fate of “poverty” by the very fact of being farmers.

Thus, Example (6) evinces the restrictivity notion of “nothing else,” and its relational nature, in the linguistic behaviors of the participants and their orientations to the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction. The two instances of *lāh*, one without other instances of restrictivity markers (Line 3), and one followed by a rhetorical question (Line 5), maintain the same conviction regarding the economic status of US farmers. The discursive modifications in K’s assertions, from Line 3 to Line 5, hinge exactly on the relational nature of *lāh*, evoking external constraint as epistemological and logical underpinnings of asserting “nothing else.”

Example (7) examines a restrictivity marker, *nā* ‘only,’ without the collocation of *lāh*, thereby identifying that *lāh* has semantic properties distinct from *nā* ‘only.’ Both *lāh* and *nā* mark a state-of-affairs as “restricted.” *Nā* is similar to the Korean particle *man* discussed earlier (e.g. *aniyo, hankukeman kongpuhapnita* ‘No, I’m studying only Korean.’ Lee, 1993: 69), and the Quirk et al. (1985) description of exclusive *only* as signaling “no more/other than” (Quirk et al., 1985: 380). The particle *nā* expresses restrictivity in relation to expectations/assumptions of a broader scope without necessarily evoking an external condition as constraint. Nor is *nā* as polemic as *lāh* in asserting the impossibility of other situations.

(7) [The Convenience Store]

((O and M, both female and friends with each other, chat about a mutual acquaintance. O updates M on the news that this mutual acquaintance's daughter is now in the employment of China Telecom, an enviable situation for a farmer's child. M acknowledges that this job is indeed remarkable.))

1M: *róh Niàn-Diàn-Kō jiāo měn di.*
 at Telecom PRT good PRT
 'It is surely nice to be at Telecom.'

2O: *róng bēi dlóng rǎnghao áo . (indistinct).*
 people go reach school bring
 'People (from China Telecom) went to (the girl's) school to pick
 (employees from their high school graduates).'

→3 *róh Xī-Fà ::n róng nā -*
 at Normal:School people only
 'At the Normal School (where the girl studied), **people** (=employer from
 China Telecom) **only-**

→4 *ló dlóng rǎnghao, gě mò nā áo gǒ dām hō*
 into reach school 3SG CLS only bring thing three CLS
 '(People) go to her school, **they only picked out three kids.**'

O uses *nā* "only" to emphasize the remarkable accomplishment of the girl, that is, China Telecom selected *only* three persons in the entire school, the girl being one of this fortunate trio. Similar to restrictive markers in other languages (e.g., English *only*, Quirk et al., 1985; Korean *man*, Lee, 1993), *nā*'s emphatic restrictive meaning rests on the focused element as a deviation from "normal" expectation, suggesting that three is indeed a very small number while a normal expectation would be larger.

In contrast, *lāh* targets an entire situation, representing the situation as restricted to what it is, nothing else being possible. Within this representation is citation of an external factor as a constraint and an epistemological basis for such assertion. Recalling Example 5(a), which contains both exclusivity marker *nā* and final *lāh* (in *Nā kào Sè - Fāng lāh*. '[She] just relies on Se-Fang [for a living; she doesn't have any other means

for a living.’]), the combination of *nā* and *lāh* goes beyond the emphatic exclusivity marked by “only,” with the concomitant understanding that the restricted affair is the only actuality, a subjective, assertive understanding of a “constraint reality.”

The next section explicates that, evocation of an external constraint, albeit often not explicitly mentioned in the discourse, is inextricable in the semantic core of *lāh*. On this relational meaning rests the range of pragmatic functions and emotive expressions that are context-specific.

5.2. The Relational Nature of “Restrictive” *Lāh*

In the dataset, the majority of *lāh* utterances (110, 79%) are in simplex sentence structures, as seen in Example 3 (invented), Example 5 (a, b, c), Table 3 (exemplars a through d), and Example 6 (Line 3 and Line 5). *Lāh* in simplex sentences states the restricted state-of-affairs, wherein the external restraining factor either remains implicit (Example 5a), or is explicitly explained in subsequent discourse (Example 5b, Example 6, Example 7).

Particularly, among the 139 utterances that end with *lāh*, 29 (21%) are in conditional constructions, the external constraint stated in the dependent clause, which forms a protasis-apodosis relationship. In these complex utterances, the constraining factors center on external circumstances, adversities, preset schedules, pre-existing conditions, resulting in all other possibilities being “impossible.” Figure 2 contains a number of representative illustrations.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

As the four sets of complex utterances in Figure 2 illustrate, the *lāh*-marked restricted state-of-affairs entwine with external factors, the confining forces, as well as epistemological justifications of restricted state-of-affairs. That is, the sentential subject can do nothing but purchase the lottery tickets as specifically requested by her friend (Illustration 1, Figure 2). Likewise, the sentential subject can do nothing but wear old clothes, since she has them anyway (Illustration 2, Figure 2). One's salary should be nothing but high, if one works for a government-owned company (Illustration 3, Figure 2). One should look nothing but younger after a shave and haircut (Illustration 4, Figure 2).

Example (8) provides an illustration of the conversation participants' different orientations to protasis-apodosis relationships of two interlinking facts; here *lāh* plays a prominent role in indicating the speaker's subjective understanding of reality. The segment occurs in the same dataset examined earlier, Example (4), involving two female friends, B and M, discussing the upcoming lottery event.

(8) [The Convenience Store]

((B and M=female. Previously, B told M that a lottery expert predicated the upcoming winning number be either 4692 or 4296. However, this prediction contradicts an earlier prediction that the total sum of the four digits in the lottery number be small. B appears perturbed by the fact that the sum of the four digits in each of the two predications is large, and alerts the interlocutor, M, to this fact.))

1B: ... *en nǎ hō lū gāng cé diào mò nì nǎ xiù di nó*
 PL DEM CLS all say value number CLS small DEM CLS PRT PRT
 'Those people (=experts) all say that the (total) value of the digits (will be) small this time (of the winning ticket).'

2 *n nō nó.*
 NEG big PRT
 '(It should) not be big! (I'm telling you!)

→3 M: *gǎo^ mò ló^ èy cé mò de yín NŌ^ lāh.*
 9 CL into PRT value CLS COP complete big LĀH

‘(It’s) got a nine (in the number), the value is (of course) big (=“big” is the only outcome. What else do you expect and why do you fuss over this?)’

(2.0)

→4 B: *gǎo^ mò nō^^ èy- gǎo^ mò nō^ èy de::: zī mò :: hiòng yāo^ mò ló^ nià liú*
 9 CLS big PRT 9 CLS big PRT COP 2 CLS with 1 CLS into come see
 ‘(If) 9 is big, (if) 9 is big, then (put) a two and a one in (the 4-digit number) to see
 (that the total value will be smaller).’

(1.0)

5 *nǎ shiù rù měng yāo mò ról di.*
 DEM CLS PRT have 1 CLS at PRT
 ‘(It seems that) every time there is always a one (in the winning lottery ticket).’

6 *en de gāng (.) hō ah de gā ::ng (.) gǎo dām bēng mǒ yín yín áo ^:::*
 PL COP say CLS PRTCOP say 9 3 two CLS complete complete bring
 ‘(But) people say- (the master) also says that 9 and 3 the two digits must be in
 (the four-digit combination in order to win).’

B seems troubled by the contradictory advice given by the lottery experts (Lines 1-2).

Her utterances are emphatic, seemingly agitated (evidenced by the hyperbolic universal quantifier *lu* “all,” lexical repetition with *ni* “small” and *n no* “not big”; both utterances end with particle *no*, which is roughly translated into English as, “I’m telling you!”).

M, on the other hand, regards B’s informative turn unnecessarily alarming. M highlights the fact that the large sum value is the only possible reality, marked with *lāh*. She also explicitly states the apparent restraining factor in the conditional clause (*Gǎo^ mò ló^ èy...* ‘(It’s got) a nine in (the number), ...’ The completive marker *yín*, as in *yín NŌ^ lāh* ‘totally large *lāh*,’ reinforces the meaning of “nothing else” and with tone of certainty.

After two-seconds silence, B counters M’s self-assured, *lāh*-marked statement by insisting on a less restricted state-of-affairs for which manipulation is possible; that is, she can replace two of the four digits in the lottery number with the digit one or two to

offset the large value of 9 (Line 6). This way, she reconciles the apparent conflict in the dichotomy of the expert's advice.

This tête-à-tête between M and B centers on everyday logical wisdom, reality, and possibilities. The manners through which the discursive interactions unfold evince the relational nature of *lāh*. That is, while the restricted state-of-affairs is the focus, the speakers also orient to the fact that the restricted reality has ties to an external factor as a constraint (as did M in Example 8). Therefore, to counter a restricted reality, one manipulates the external factor (as did B in Example 8).

5.3. Emotive Stances: Contextualization of Constraint Reality

Speakers' emotive stances, as well as subjective expressions in general, are not a peripheral addition to referential meanings, but are the heart of language (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1989; see also Benveniste, 1971; Maynard, 1993). Shishan *lāh*, with the core meaning of restrictivity ("nothing else" due to external constraint), is a resource for a range of emotive stances such as regret, dismissiveness, resignation, indignation, resolve, etc., either toward the state-of-affairs of concern or toward the addressee.

For example, one may express an emotive stance toward the state-of-affairs such that the situation is regretful and deplorable, drawing on the depiction that a certain restricted state (e.g. the scope of one's choices, actions), is the reality, while a broader, or unrestrained, scope is more desirable, wished, expected, but un-attainable. The speaker may also presuppose that the addressee knows the external constraining factor, and expresses indignation and dismissiveness toward the addressee who has not realized the

simple epistemological connection between the external factor and the resulting one-and-only reality.

The following example illustrates an expression of regret, facilitated by *lāh*.

While explaining a childhood experience of having to cease attending school, M uses *lāh* to deplore her lack of choices as a young girl, struggling in poverty.

(9) [Noodle Restaurant]

((Previous interaction contains M's lengthy narrative of her childhood hardship, particularly the time when she had to quit school to help with family farm work; M and NL=females))

1 M: *mō e:: lén niā nǎi shuǎn vēn, n mēng dōng-dě hūk dānggēi hě.*
2SG PRT return come cry all day NEG have heart-mood do what ever
'You (=I) returned home (=dropped out of school) and cried all day. (I) had no mood for doing anything.'

2 NL: *xiū mō bēi dlóng giǔ heégiù èy nā he? ?*
CLS 2SG go reach how grade PRT only drop:out
'At that time, you got to study until which grade when you had to drop out?'

→3 M: *rā bēi duì--o yín de pǎh lāh.*
1SG go elementary-school complete COP cease LĀH
'I just completed elementary school, that's it.'
[My education=elementary School; no more]

4NL: *duì-o pǎh mì? Xiū mō n bēi-*
elementary-school cease PRT CLS 2SG NEG go
'(You) stopped at elementary school? That time you didn't go-'

5M: *rā kǎo gēn dōng-o èy.*
1SG take:examination up middle-school PRT
'I passed the entrance examination for middle school.'

→6 *diā-mǎi de n měng sè? bēi bōnóy de n bēi lāh.*
dad-mom COP NEG have money go enroll COP NEG go LĀH
'(My) parents **had no money to pay for the tuition, so I just didn't go (=didn't continue schooling).**' [My choice=quit School; no other options]

M uses two tokens of *lāh* to mark the restricted nature of her education (Line 3 and Line

6): Line 3 emphasizes the completion of elementary school as M's only education, which

is perhaps the lowest unit of formal schooling. In a similar vein, *lāh* in Line 6 stresses M's only choice, i.e., ceasing education, because of her parents' financial difficulty. In both cases, through *lāh*, the speaker evokes the understanding that external adversities exclude other options, more desirable ones. The fact that M had passed the entrance examination to middle school (Line 5) further exacerbates the undesirable nature of M's lack of choices; external adversities, however, nullify this volitional achievement.

The relational notion of “nothing else” naturally gives rise to the expression of resignation, an emotive function also noted in other particles in Southeast Asian languages (e.g. Singapore English *lor*, Wee, 2002, discussed in more detail in Section 6). In Shishan, “resignation” is a context-specific function of *lāh* in which the speaker marks one's volition as futile when confronting external constraint. The following segment, occurring at the roasted meat vendor's stand, is an illustration:

(10) [The Duck Vendor]

((VR, C25=female; VR=meat vendor; C25=customer; the segment is at the beginning of their service-encounter interaction))

1VR: *róng gāng ná xiū dlì guāiqiǎo luéi lo.*
 people say DEM CLS M strange together PRT
 ‘People say that this time (the lottery) is going to be weird altogether again.’

2C25: *ah ráng hǒ āy.*
 also NEG know able
 ‘(It) is yet not knowable.’

3VR: *róng gāng ná xiū dlì kuǎi guāiqiǎo véi luéi lo.*
 people say DEM CLS M open strange number together PRT
 ‘People say that this time (the lottery) is going to announce a weird number altogether again.’

4C25: *de dī-zī-dām-dī en-eey mǎn gāng di.*
 COP 4-2-3-4 PL-PRT good say PRT
 ‘(If it) is 4234 like that, that's well-spoken (=that would be weird) for sure.’

→5VR: *n hǒ lāh.*

NEG know PRT
 ‘(I/we) just **don’t know (and that’s it.)**’

→6 ***tōng-tōng nā hǒ lāh.***
 end-end only know PRT
 ‘(I/we will) **only know** (what the winning number is) **when (it is) over.**’
 ((VR initiates service encounter with a new customer))

This short segment supersedes the brief service encounter between VR and C25. VR initiates “small talk” during the transaction, by commenting on the current lottery, specifically, the circulating rumors that the winning lottery number will be a bizarre combination of digits again, defying predictions and calculations (Line 1).

C25’s uptake does not show particular enthusiasm in discussing the lottery, with a “reality-check” that the lottery is difficult to predict (Line 2); such a negative and rational view does not encourage gossip of the lottery’s upcoming, expectedly bizarre number. VR then repeats, almost verbatim, her initial comment, yet more emphatically, adding the verb *kuāi* ‘to open’ (denoting the act of the winning lottery number being publicly announced), and *věi* ‘number.’ This emphatic re-assertion succeeds in eliciting comment from C25 who gives her own opinion as to which number would indeed be weird (Line 4).

At this time, a new customer approaches. *Lāh* occurs twice in VR’s subsequent remarks, aiming, rather hastily, to end the chit-chat which she wittingly initiated (Lines 5 and 6). VR’s two consecutive utterances emphasize the unpredictable nature of the lottery. That is, the winning lottery number is only revealed when the game has ended (Line 4, repetitive use of *tōng-tōng* ‘the very end,’ exclusive marker *nā* ‘only,’ and *lāh*); likewise, before the announcement of the lottery result, the winning lottery number is simply unknowable. Both utterances assert un-knowing as the only possibility; the emotive stance of “resignation” derives from this acknowledgment of the futility of volition in the

game of chance, where one's knowledge is always, and fated to be, passive. Resignation to the unknowable nature of the lottery disallows further gossip; the two utterances successfully function to end the conversation.

Utterances marked with *lāh* may also express the speaker's attitude toward the addressee, such as indignation, dismissiveness, challenge, etc. Example (11) involves the use of *lāh* by two speakers consecutively engaged in verbal retort. One speaker asserts a course-of-action as the only course-of-action considered (expressing indignation toward the addressee), while another speaker does not acquiesce in the prior speaker's assertion of restrictivity; she retorts with similar emotive strength.

(11) [The Hair Dresser's Shop]

((This segment was recorded around 9 AM in the morning. A male passer-by, MP1, comes into the shop, greets the shop owner, H.))

1MP1: *diǎ sāo èy lóu?*
meal morning PRT PRT
'Have (you) had breakfast?'

2H: *ránggēi? =*
how:what
'What (are you up to)?'

→3MP1: = *ránggēi ↑? dlī chóng má::xià ló ná^:n lāh. Rá^nggēi ?* =
how:what M set:up Mahjong into play PRT how/what
'What (am I up to)? (I'm) gonna set up (a group to) play Mahjong.
What (am I up to)?'

→4M: = *jiāng hà^:o-ěi lāh. Ránggēi lóu?*
cut head PRT PRT how/what PRT
'Have your hair cut, of course! What (else) indeed?'

5H: *hào mō mò dlī jiǎng n jiǎng ?*
head 2SG CLS M cut NEG cut
'Does the hair of yours want a cut or not?'

Entering the store, MP1's initial question, asking if H has had breakfast, is a typical greeting in Shishan and other Southeast Asian cultures (cf. Duranti, 2001); however, instead of completing the greeting routine (e.g. confirming or disconfirming one has eaten), H responds with a *wh*-interrogative, which registers MP1's initial greeting as a pre-sequence (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), (i.e., a turn that "beats around the bush"), possibly in preparation for a favor-requesting.

MP1 plays along by feigning indignation for having his "hidden agenda" detected; he discloses a laughable proposition, drawing on the import of *lāh* to assert that he is going to use H's storefront for Mahjong-playing. MP1's turn begins with a verbatim repetition of H's prior turn, *ránggēi* 'what/how?' appropriating it as a rhetorical question (cf. Bakhtin, 1981). The ensuing frivolous content itself (i.e. playing Mahjong at H's storefront at nine o'clock in the morning), the definite modality marker *dli*, dramatic rising intonation, and using *lāh* to present the frivolity of Mahjong-playing as the only action in motion, jointly deliver a comic, "indignant" retort.

M, who is H's senior relative, captures this joking overtone and, in due course, retorts. Just as MP1 appropriates H's preceding turn and uses it for his playful comeback, M appropriates two features of MP1's prior turn—*lāh* and the interrogative *ránggēi* 'what/how,' embedding both features in alternative content. That is, what MP should do is have his hair cut, indisputably so, as he entered a hair salon, after all. M's use of *lāh* rests on the fact that the conversation takes place at a hair salon; thus, the only honorable reason for entering the shop would be for a haircut, nothing else, playing Mahjong, notwithstanding. These verbal retorts end with the salon owner, H, assuming the exchange by formally extending a service offer (Line 5).

The escalating verbal retorts throughout Lines 2-4 (MP1 addressing H, and in turn, M addressing MP1) have the markedly quick tempo of turn-taking, overall dramatic intonation, and remarkable features of intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980). The sequence is lively and emotive as language is, not in small part attributable to the linguistic import of *lāh*.

5.5. Suggestions and Resolutions: Circumstances Constraining Courses-of-Action

Propositions for future courses-of-action constitute the communicative intent of suggestions, advice, and resolutions. In the current data, *lāh*-marked suggestions/advice and resolutions constitute 8.6% of all occurrences (12 out of 139). The interactive import of *lāh* in suggestions/advice and resolutions builds on the relational meaning of restrictivity that the planned course-of-action is the only one to be considered; nothing else, following from pre-existing circumstances, is advisable, possible, desirable, necessary, sensible, etc. Coupled with these suggestions and resolutions may be emotive expressions (such as strong resolve, regret, resignation), appeal to the addressee's common sense, commonsense logic, as well as the speaker's mitigation of the imposing nature of suggestions/advice (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Example (12) illustrates the use of *lāh* in making suggestions/invitations while mitigating the imposing nature of these acts. The speaker construes her suggestion and invitation as peripheral to, and in compliance with, the addressee's routine activities, hence not inconveniencing the invitee.

(12) [The Hair Salon]

((M is in the Salon when an old friend arrives. Her friend apologizes that she cannot stay, as she has to scatter fertilizer in the sugarcane field. M responds with two suggestions.))

→1 M: *mō áo liáo mǎi de áo lāh*
 2SG bring fertilizer sugarcane COP bring LĀH
 ‘If you (have to) scatter fertilizer in the sugarcane field, **(you concern yourself with nothing else, but just) do it.**’

2 *gūde gāng, dlōu rōh lé :::n, ró:::h bēng dām vēn ée,*
 but say 1PL at return at two three day PRT
 ‘But say, we have returned and will stay for two to three days.’

→3 *mō nā dlì wū? hó, mō nā:::::: ló niā bēng lāh*
 2SG only M go:out market 2SG only into come rest LĀH
 ‘Only when you come to the market (anyway), **only (then) you come in and rest** (=spend time with me; there is no need to inconvenience yourself by making a special trip).’

M’s two suggestions occur in Line 1 and Line 3, respectively. Both utterances specify a certain pre-existing circumstance. In Line 1, M highlights the farm work that her friend has to attend and that attention will prevent her from spending time with M. M urges her friend to comply with this circumstance despite her own wish for her friend’s company. Line 3 constitutes both a suggestion and an invitation. M suggests (and invites) her friend to visit at a convenient time. M uses two tokens of *nā* ‘only,’ one in the conditional clause (i.e. *mō nā dlì wū? hó* ‘only when you come to the market’) and one in the *lāh*-marked main clause (i.e. *mō nā::::::ló niā bēng lāh* ‘only (then) do you come in and rest [=spend time with me]’) (Line 3). That is, M’s friend does not need to visit M when incurring inconvenience. Instead, the visit should coincide, peripherally, with the routine of coming to the market. As such, *lāh*, in corroboration with other linguistic devices, constitutes a negative politeness strategy, mitigating the “face threatening” nature of an invitation that potentially impedes the addressee’s need for free action (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

While able to mitigate an invitation, *lāh* is equally capable of marking strong advice and resolute remarks about future courses-of-action. Drawing on the import of *lāh*, the speaker may emphasize that, rather than relinquishing volition, regaining control and exerting volition are the only sensible courses-of-action. Example (13) is an illustration:

(13) [The Convenience Store]

((B=storeowner, female; S=friend, male; prior to this segment, B has told S about an unpleasant experience with a handyman who begrudged her criticism and left work unfinished. B's husband has made several telephone calls to the handyman to urge him to resume work, with no result; B is becoming frustrated.))

1B: *rā gāng zàigū zǐú mō ā dēr.*

I said never ask 2SG PRT PRT

'I said (to myself), I should never ask you (referring to the handyman).'

2 *mō e::: chù mō nā-ǎh hūk gǒ mì?*

2SG INT just 2SG self do thing PRT

'You (=the handyman)- (So you think) only you (=the handyman) can do the job, is that it?'

→3S: *eh eh n niū de pǎ^:::h lā ::::h.*

INT INT NEG come COP cease LĀH

'If (he) doesn't come, so be it (no need to count on him)!'

4B: ((laughing))

5S: *mō gāng dlì n měng sè? mǎn di dē^r,*

2SG say M NEG have money good PRT PRT

'You say, if (one) has no money (to hire someone else), that (would) be (a) real (problem).'

6 *dlì měng sē? mmmm dānggēi n hě^:::?*

M have money what NEG okay

'As (one) has money, mmmm what isn't okay? (rhetorical question=everything is doable; one can hire whoever one desires.)'

7 *góng^? Ōng hō ^:::*

PRT fool CLS

'Right? That fool.'

Regarding B's problem, S makes a strong resolute comment that B disregard this matter entirely, not pursuing the handyman further. Similar to other suggestions, *lāh* highlights a specific circumstance as restricting what one should/can do; that is, the handyman does not want to complete the job (*n niā* 'not come,' Line 3), following which, and afforded by B's financial ease, the only sensible action is to discontinue the handyman's contracted service. *Lāh*, through its relational meaning of "nothing else," marks exactly that advocating volitional control is due to the handyman's unreasonable stubbornness and B's own financial capability (Line 5 and Line 6).

5.6. Questions: Realizing/Challenging/Emphasizing "Nothing Else"

Only a few instances of *lāh* appeared in an interrogative structure (8 out of 139, 5.7%). Although the number is small for any conclusive analytical outcome, the patterns deserve comment. All eight questions, appended with *lāh*, are grammatical without *lāh*, wherein *lāh* adds expressive nuances to the interrogative. The eight instances occur in two types of interrogatives: four are assertive yes/no questions marked with rising intonation. The other four occur in morphologically marked interrogatives, specifically, two in alternative questions, and two in elliptical *wh*-questions.

Questions with the rising intonation, ending with *lāh*, are requests for confirmation (or "declarative questions"; Quirk et al., 1985). The immediate context, prior discourse, or certain independent knowledge, has given the speaker sufficient grounds to conjecture a proposition, *vis-à-vis* a restricted state-of-affairs, awaiting the addressee's (dis)confirmation. For instance, the speaker conjectures that a restricted state-of-affairs results from a given circumstance, as illustrated in Example (14):

(14) [Noodle Restaurant]

((BC=restaurant owner; K =native of Shishan; pursuing advanced studies in the US. BC asks K whether he still speaks Chinese all the time in the US.))

1 BC: *dōu bēi hē de- shuǎnbū de ah gāng guōwěi nǎ gēi, n guó ?*
 2PL go LOC COP all COP also say Chinese DEM type NEG COP
 ‘You guys over there, you still speak Chinese all the time, don’t you?’

→2 K: *gāng - rólāh de gāng guōwěi lāh.*
 say at home COP say Chinese LĀH
 ‘Say- **at home, (we) speak Chinese.**’
 [At home→Speak Chinese; no English at home]

→3 BC: *èy bēi rǎnghāo de ah shuǎnbū gāng yīngwěi lāh ?*
 PRT go school COP also all say English LĀH
 ‘Then, **when (you are) at school, (you) speak English all the time?**’
 [At school→Speak English; no Chinese)]

4 K: *dle - dlǎng lèlā zhōngguō de gāng gōwěi lèh.*
 Have with child Chinese COP say Chinese PRT
 ‘When we are with Chinese kids, we speak Chinese.’

BC’s question in Line 1 inquires about K’s English proficiency and experience studying in the US, suggesting that, as K has only been in the US for one year, K probably still speaks Chinese in all settings.

Through the use of *lāh* (Line 2), K limits the scope of his language use to Chinese only in the home environment. Immediately, B realizes that his prior assumption is erroneous. Through a simple inference, B indicates that, if the home language is Chinese, then the school language is entirely in English, highlighted with *lāh*. This example, therefore, represents a straightforward instance of *lāh* in a confirmation request.

Likewise, the speaker may cast doubt on a restricted state-of-affairs by indicating a condition that should lead to a broader range of choices than a restricted state-of-affairs, illustrated in Example (15):

(15) [The Hair Salon]

((H=hair salon owner and stylist; M=H's relative; MP1=male passer-by #1; H and M have been ridiculing MP1 about his hair, which they think needs a cut.))

...

1 H: *sō mō mò jiāo n rái gū lóu ?*
 hair 2SG CLS PRT NEG enable cut PRT
 '(You think) your hair is not yet long for a cut?'

→2 MP1: *whèiló . = sō nǎ yàng de gā gi[^]ū lāh?*
 INT hair DEM type COP already cut LĀH
 'Wow, (my) hair like this, (it) already needs a cut?'
 [Condition of my hair= nothing else appropriate but a haircut]

(1.0)

3 *n dló[^]:ng (.) mò luéibai lóu:::*
 NEG reach CLS week PRT
 'It has not even been one week (since my last haircut).'

(1.2)

4 H: *mō n dǒng duān ō yé dām dēi lóu[^]*
 2SG NEG know count one two three four PRT
 'You don't even know how to count one, two, three, four (not to mention remembering when you had your last haircut).'

Prior to MP1's utterance in Line 2, H, along with her friend/relative M, has been emphasizing that MP1's hair desperately needs a cut. MP1 registers his interlocutor's assessment in a confirmation request that, as far as his hair is concerned, a haircut is the only option (Line 2), marked with *lāh*; the exclamatory interjector *whèiló* 'wow' and the adverbial *gā* 'already' suggest unexpectedness. Different from the *lāh*-marked question in Example (14), in which the speaker readily accepts his adjusted view, MP1 doubts this restricted state-of-affairs, by following with a challenge that he had a haircut less than one week ago (Line 3). H further ridicules MP1 by asserting that MP1 does not know how to count, so consequently, his memory is probably erroneous, and a haircut is likely long overdue.

The other four instances of *lāh* occur in alternative questions and *wh*-questions. Alternative questions, ending in falling intonation, propose a set of choices with the expectation that only one is the answer (e.g. “Would you like chocolate, vanilla, or strawberry ice cream?”[Quirk et al, 1985: 823]). An alternative question with a given set of two options is a suitable environment for the relational restrictivity notion marked by *lāh*. After all, negating one of two given alternatives becomes, by default, the pre-existing condition for determining that the answer must be the only option that remains. Example (16) is an illustration:

(16) Alternative Question Marked with *lāh*

a. [Duck Vendor’s Stall]

((VR, the vendor, saw VO and her child passing by. She calls out to VO.))

→VR: *Vō ou, hō de Ah-Lín mì Ah-Yàn lāh?*

Vo PRT CLS COP Ah- Lín PRT Ah-Yàn PRT

‘Vo, is the one Ah- Lín or Ah-Yàn? (=If she is not Ah-Lin, then she must be Ah-Yan.)’

Vo has two children called Ah-Lin and Ah-Yan. VR’s greeting to her friend, Vo, inquires as to the name of the child presently accompanying her mother to the market. Apparently, the choice is closed-ended and has two possibilities. If the child present is not Ah-Lin, then she is Ah-Yan. The question is felicitous without the final particle, in which case, the speaker would be stating, plainly, an inquiry for the child’s identification. The addition of *lāh* expresses such an interrogative overtone which could be captioned with an epistemic certainty marker, as in “then it must be...,” targeting the remaining, only possibility. Thus, *Lāh* functions to counteract the embarrassment of not recalling the child’s name at the moment by displaying certainty and prior knowledge, in spite of difficulty with recall.

Wh- questions are focus questions, in that the proposition typically contains an unknown indefinite referent represented by the interrogative pronoun (i.e. what, when, who, etc. [Quirk et al., 1985]). The *wh*- pronoun evokes a set of possible answers of an open-ended nature, for instance, when asking “Which plane did Mary arrive on?” the answer can be, theoretically, “Any flight” (McCawley, 1988: 490).

In the case of *wh*-questions marked with *lāh*, interestingly, the indefinite nature of the referent of the interrogative pronoun no longer remains. *Lāh* is able to render definite identification of the referent intended by the interrogative pronoun, as illustrated in

Example (17):

(17) *Wh*-Question and *lāh* [Convenience Store]

((M is telling the store owner, B, that, before B came in the store, M saw B’s son along with another young man in the store. Note two consecutive tokens of *lāh*))
 →1M: *rā míng* (.) *Ah-Sān hióng lě* (.) *hō de- básó hō de- rángchòng zú lāh?*
 1SG just:now Ah-Sān with son CLS COP eldest CLS COP how call PRT
 ‘I was just now- Ah-San and the son- the eldest, **what’s his name now?**’

→2 *ah-dānggēi lāh?*
 ah-what PRT
 ‘(His name is) **Ah-what now?**’

In this segment, M begins a recount of a chance meeting with B’s son, along with another youngster. The recounting begins with the first-person and a temporal shift *míng* ‘just now,’ followed by the characters in concern (i.e., Ah-San and another young man, the latter of whom is not identified by name but by his familial relation, *lě hō* ‘[the] son’). Having difficulty recalling the name of the youngster, M pauses, then attempts to restart her recounting by referring to the youngster by his rank in the family, *básó hō* ‘(the) eldest one’; still unable to recall the name, M then abandons her thread of story-telling, and initiates a *wh*- question, *rángchòng zú lāh?* ‘How/what (is he) called?’ marked with

lāh. M then restates the question with even narrower interrogative focus, *Ah-dānggēi lāh?* ‘(His name is) Ah-*what?*’ (The prefix *ah-* is an endearing form of address for persons of familiarity and junior status.)

As such, although the number of *lāh* instances is not abundant in interrogatives, the discursive constructions support the central argument of the restrictivity notion of *lāh*. *Lāh* adds various contextualized overtones to a question (e.g. casting the act of inquiry in light of prior knowledge and epistemic certainty). It may also render a definite reading of the *wh-* pronoun, in an effort to target a definite referent stored in the speaker’s memory, albeit not recollected. These effects plausibly arise from the restrictivity meaning of *lāh*, signaling a referent to “this and nothing else.”

6. *Lāh* and Particles in Neighboring Languages: Assertion of “Obviousness” and Other Functional Similarities

In certain cases of *lāh*-use, while asserting “nothing else,” the overtone of *lāh* also encompasses a sense of allegation, to the addressee, that the situation described in the utterance is obvious, self-evident, or commonsensical. For example, in Example (4), given that both the digit 3 and the digit 9 need to be in the lottery number and that the sum of the digits needs to be small, the digit to include in a potentially winning lottery number, is 3, not 9, an obvious conclusion. Similarly, in Example (8), if the digit 9 must be in the lottery number, the total sum of the lottery digits is certainly large, a self-explanatory fact. Similar epistemic assertions of “obviousness” are evident in Examples (3) and (11-Line 4), captured felicitously by the adverbial, “of course,” in the translation.

As is the case of other functions of *lāh* noted in the preceding sections, the pragmatic expression of “obviousness” derives from the central relational notion, “nothing else” due to a pre-existing, external constraint. The epistemic assertion of “obviousness” has its basis in a context-specific qualification that the addressee knows the external, constraining factor (e.g. the addressee has professed knowledge of the constraining factor in prior discourse; the speaker has explicitly informed the addressee to that effect; the information is commonly shared in the culture, etc.). After all, with the restricting factor already known, one needs to expend little effort to reach the knowledge of the resultant one-and-only restricted state-of-affairs, hence the epistemic overtone, “obviousness.”

A number of final particles in Southeast Asian languages have the characteristic of marking “obviousness.” Notably, among those, are Mandarin *me* (Chappell, 1991; Chu, 1998, Chapter 4), Singapore English *lor* (Platt and Ho, 1989; Wee, 2002) and Cantonese *lo* (Luke, 1990; Matthews and Yip, 1994; Yip and Matthews, 2001).¹³ Besides marking “obviousness,” these particles accomplish a range of similar functions as *lāh*, particularly, the evincing of negative emotive stances, and making suggestions based on pre-existing circumstances. However, no previous studies related these meanings/functions to a restrictive notion. To further explicate Shishan *lāh*, and to evaluate the assertion of “obviousness” as commonly shared among these neighboring languages, this section reviews similar particles in Southeast Asian languages, explicating their pragmatic functions as noted in the literature and comparing their use with those in Shishan. The discussion pinpoints that, while the assertion of “obviousness” is common among these

languages, “obviousness” alone as an epistemic assertion does not capture a subjective representation of a “constraint reality,” which is central to Shishan *lāh*.

The conventionally accepted meanings of “obvious” include, among other meanings, “readily or easily perceived by the sensibilities or mind,” “requiring very little insight or reflection to perceive, recognize, or comprehend” (Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2002: 1559). Quirk et al. (1985), commenting on the English “attitudinal disjuncts” such as “clearly, evidently, manifestly, obviously, patently, plainly,” suggested that these expressions signal the speaker’s conviction of the propositional content, particularly, that “one can perceive the truth of what is said” (Quirk et al., 1985: 511, 514). Nevertheless, when viewed in natural conversation, a speaker’s assertion that a certain information/situation is “obvious” is not simply assessing it as “capable of easy perception” to the speaker alone, but also extendable to the addressee and every member of the particular speech community. That is, “obviousness” is a linguistic expression of “intersubjective evidentiality” that certain “evidence is known to (or accessible by) a larger group of people who share a conclusion based on it” (Nuyts, 2001: 34; cf. Lyons’ [1977] notion of “objective epistemic modality” [798]; see also Whitt [2011]).

Early studies that focused on the taxonomies of utterance-final particles, as well as descriptive grammars, tend to adopt the notion of “obviousness” as a description sufficient in itself. Platt and Ho (1989) categorized *lor* in Singapore English as a marker of “obviousness.” For instance, in response to the question “What do they sell at the market?” the speaker answers, “Sell fish *lor*, vegetable *lor*, meat *lor*, all this lah.” Here, *lor* marks the items as “obvious” and self-evident (Platt and Ho, 1989: 217). Others noted

lor as a marker of “weak” suggestion (Gupta, 1992¹⁴); for instance, when a mother notices that her daughter could not unwrap a chocolate bar, she utters, “This one you take *lor*” (Gupta, 1992: 43). Wee (2002) argued that *lor* is polysemous, signaling both “obviousness” (cf. Platt and Ho, 1989) and the emotion of “resignation.” As an example, Wee discussed a situation in which speaker A asks speaker B why she is so family-oriented. B answers with *lor*, as in “It’s the way I’ve been brought up *lor*” (Wee, 2002: 714). As Wee explained, *lor* marks the personal trait of being “family-oriented” as one that arises from circumstances (e.g., family environment, instead of the speaker’s own sense of virtue, perhaps, a self-effacing strategy) (Wee, 2002: 714).

Applying “resignation” to explain Gupta’s (1992) examples concerning “weak” suggestions, Wee argued that the mother’s suggestion to the child, “This one you take *lor*,” is rather advice to the child to adopt a stance of resignation. Employing the grammaticalization and subjectivization framework (see Traugott, 1982, 1988, 1989, 1995; Traugott and König, 1991), Wee (2002) further suggested that “resignation” is a later development of *lor*, wherein the particle becomes increasingly subjectivized. The motivation for such change is that, when a situation is obvious (an objective situation), one has little choice other than resignation to the “obvious” (a subjective emotion).

The literature on *lor* does not explicate the capacity of *lor* in expressing emotive stances beyond “resignation.” As is the case of Shishan *lāh*, “resignation” is one of the many possible emotive expressions, deriving from the representation of an externally conditioned “restricted” state of affairs, i.e. a “constraint reality.” As such, Shishan *lāh* is capable of expressing “resignation” (Example 10), on the one hand, and strong resolve and advocating volitional control, on the other (Example 13). The marking of suggestion

by *lāh*, likewise, may resonate a sense of “resigning to reality” in light of the unalterable nature of pre-existing circumstances. On the other hand, suggestions marked by *lāh* may also appear emotion-neutral where the focus is on mitigating the potential inconvenience of a suggested activity (see Example 12), where “resignation” is irrelevant.

Early scholarly notes on Cantonese *lo* and Mandarin *me*¹⁵ show a similar readiness for using “obviousness” as a basic semantic (or functional) notion, as the history of research on Singapore English *lor* shows (e.g., Cantonese *lo*, Kwok, 1984: 58; Matthews and Yip, 1994: 340; Mandarin *me*, Kubler and Ho, 1984: 76; Chao, 1968:801). However, Luke (1990, Chapter 4), on Cantonese *lo*, and Chappell (1991; also Chu, 1998) on Mandarin *me*, differ with their predecessors by using conversation/discourse data and producing the argument that, with regard to the particles’ respective abilities to mark “obviousness,” the assertion of “obviousness” is not due to the speaker’s evaluation of the propositional content *per se*, but because a situation, cast in light of previously established facts/situations, becomes viewed as “natural,” “obvious,” etc.

Specifically, Chappell (1991) argued that *me*’s assertion of “obviousness” results from the situation in focus being “the direct consequence of either another situation mentioned in the preceding conversation or some piece of shared knowledge of the speaker and hearer” (Chappell, 1991: 50). A telling example, from the Chinese Pear Stories, which form part of Chappell’s data (cf. Erbaugh, 1990), is: The narrator tells the story depicted in an animated film. When relaying the event that the protagonist fell off his bicycle, the speaker says, *yīnwei xīn... xīn huāng me. Tā tōu-le dōngxi*, ‘because he was feeling upset (marked with *me*); after all, he’d stolen something’ (Chappell, 1991: 48, #12). In this example, *me* marks a self-evident explanatory link between the event

currently in focus (i.e. the child's falling off his bicycle), and a previously known situation (i.e. the child stole some fruit and was consequently feeling upset). The previously known situation is marked with *me*. In effect, *me* identifies a "cause-effect" relationship that is "obvious."

Comparing Shishan *lāh* with Mandarin *me*, the relational meaning noted in Chappell (1991) (i.e. casting new topic/current discourse-focus in light of previously established facts or situation) is parallel. Interestingly, however, based on the data given in Chappell (1991), Mandarin *me* and Shishan *lāh* occur in a reverse position in the cause-effect relationship evoked: Shishan uses *lāh* to mark the resultant restricted state while Mandarin *me* appends to utterances that contain information previously known. Thus, applying *me* to the teahouse scenario discussed earlier in Example (3), a Mandarin speaker, in delivering the same message, likely would say, *Baozi, nimen de tese dianxin ME* 'Stuffed bun. Your specialty snack-ME.' *Me* appends to the part of the utterance explicitly addressing the celebrated status of the snack of choice, and consequently provides an explanatory link to the choice.

Chappell (1991) also noted that, apart from "obviousness" marking, *me* displays a propensity toward signaling disagreement, particularly, "indignation" and/or "impatience" (Chappell, 1991: 54-56) toward the addressee. Chappell (1991) presented the marking of a disagreement stance as polysemous with "obviousness." In signaling disagreement, the cause-effect linking function does not remain; rather, *me* marks "a bald assertion without any hint of the possible rationale behind it" and that "a situation is 'self-evident' (and thus does not require any explanation)" (Chappell, 1991:53). For instance, when the conversationalist concedes a point which the speaker already holds, the speaker

may say, *shì zhèi yàng de me*, ‘Well it really is like this,’ expressing indignation that the addressee held a different view at all (Chappell, 1991: 54, #21).

Independent of Chappell (1991) and based on a much larger set of data, Chu (1998) presented a tripartite analysis of *me* explicating the particle’s meaning at the semantic level, at the epistemic modality level, and at the discourse level, respectively. At the core semantic level, Chu (1998) argued that *me* marks a proposition as “presupposed” (i.e., it is “known to the addressee” and “derivable from presupposed knowledge”) (Chu, 1998: 132; 130-132). Other meanings, as noted in Chappell (1991) such as “obviousness,” and attitudinal stances (i.e. disagreement, indignation, impatience) are due to the “presuppositional” meaning of *me* combined with contextual factors. Chu (1998) disagreed with Chappell (1990) in treating epistemic assertions and “disagreement” speaker stances as polysemous, by arguing that various speaker stances are at the “modality” level, derived from the combined meaning “factuality” and speaker “insistence.” As concerning “obviousness” marking, Chu (1998) identified this meaning as discourse-level derivation of “presupposed knowledge,” linking current proposition to prior discourse and suggesting such senses as “I told you so” (Chu, 1998:176-178).

Mandarin *me*’s expression of a negative attitudinal stance toward the addressee is parallel to that of the Shishan *lāh* in similar interactional contexts, expressing indignation, impatience, etc. (see discussions and examples in Section 5.3). While Chappell (1991) qualified such disagreeable stances as based on asserting the matter at hand to be utterly “obvious,” Chu’s (1998) explication centralizes on the speaker’s “insistence” on the “factuality” of propositions. The range of emotive stances of Shishan *lāh*, based on a relational restrictivity notion, is demonstrably broader than Mandarin *me*. The speaker

can either exploit the opposition between actual situations/events vs. one's desires, wishes and expectations (regret, resignation, etc.) or the epistemic status of the external factor (if it is ostensibly known, it provides epistemic ground for expressing various degrees of indignation toward the addressee for not having made the conclusion independently). The speaker may also evince an attitudinal stance toward the represented situation itself while maintaining alignment with the addressee, such as demonstrating understanding of the addressee's prior talk through inference of a restricted state (Example 14), expressing politeness and sensitivity toward the addressee (Example 11), marking a sense of resignation to reality while aligning with the addressee in general attitude toward the situation in focus (Example 10). Hence, the emotive stances expressed by *lāh* are more diverse, and attitudinal alignment with the addressee more flexible, encompassing disagreement as well as mutual orientation and empathy.

Luke (1990) analyzed three particles, *la*, *lo*, and *wo*, in Cantonese, based on naturally occurring conversation data. In his discussion of *lo* (Luke, 1990, Chapter 4), Luke proposed two general descriptions of *lo*: a device for a "completion proposal," such that a particular conversational task should come to, or is coming to, completion and indexing a "dependency relationship" such that various discourse segments have their interpretation according to their relationships to other discourse entities or situations.

Regarding the particular function of *lo* in marking "obviousness," Luke argued that the notion of "obviousness" is due to *lo*'s general function of directing the hearer to interpret the utterance through a "dependency relationship," such as "antecedent-consequent, premise-conclusion, problem-solution, cause-effect," etc. (Luke, 1990: 163). This interpretation suggests that a situation should be viewed as "natural, reasonable, and

unnoteworthy” (Luke, 1990: 193-194). For instance, in reporting events, *lo* attaches to “regular and predictable” events which “follow naturally from some given circumstances” (e.g., “going in for a drink,” marked with *lo*, is natural to a prior situation: “We were very thirsty”) (Luke, 1990: 137).

Luke (1990) further showed that *lo*, while occurring in utterances of advice/suggestion, marks proposed course-of-action to be “a reasonable course of action to take, given certain external circumstances” due to the general indexing of a “dependency relationship” by the particle (Luke, 1990: 159). Yip and Matthews (2001; Matthews and Yip, 1994) also noted that *lo* often co-occurs with *maih* ‘then,’ when the construed suggestion is an “obvious conclusion” (156-157), or follows a certain specified condition, such as *Leih jough dak mhoisam maih wan daih yih fahn gung lo*¹⁶, ‘If you’re not happy in your work, then find another job’ (Yip and Matthews, 2001:156-157).

As such, both Cantonese *lo* and Mandarin *me*, in marking “obviousness,” link a current situation to a prior-existing situation or prior discourse, for which the explanatory link is “obvious” (Chappell, 1991; Chu, 1998), or the relationship is “natural” (Luke, 1990). While the relational nature of the particles is similar among Cantonese *lo*, Mandarin *me*, and Shishan *lāh*, a relational index alone, and the subsequent understanding of a focused situation as “unnoteworthy,” or “obvious,” does not capture, fully, the functions of Shishan *lāh*. In various instances, *lāh* portrays the situation in focus, *vis-à-vis* other possibilities; thus, it both imparts to the utterance a subjective representation of the world (“constraint reality”), and is a polemic resource in conversation, resorting to world-knowledge as justification for asserting a restricted reality/course-of-action against all other possibilities (“nothing else”).

With regard to Shishan *lāh*, the notion of “obviousness” is only true sometimes, when the addressee knows the external factor that acts as constraint, apparent from mention in preceding discourse, in culture knowledge, and so on. Abundant instances represent no strong evidence of the expression of “obviousness.” Nor does strong reason exist for believing that the speaker’s primary communicative intent is to assess information as “obvious.” Recalling Example 5 (a), one’s elementary school classmate, whom one has not seen in nearly 20 years, has no other means of survival than relying on her husband’s support. This fact is hardly self-evident or “obvious.” The situation does become more enlightened when the constraining factor, for instance, rural women’s lack of job prospects in general, is mutually understood, which, however, is a context-specific property and needs not be present in the semantic core.

The current discussion does not argue for the restrictivity notion’s applicability to these similar particles in neighboring languages. Noticeable, however, in the studies of Mandarin *me*, Cantonese *lo*, and Singapore English *lor*, are word choices in translations and proposed explications indicating the notion of “nothing else” (e.g. “no other choice but...” [Wee, 2002: 721]; “nothing can be done” [Wee, 2002: 712]; the general “completion proposal” of the conversational functions of *lo*, indicating no further need for discussion [Luke, 1990]; “the situation is clear and obvious, no further discussion need be entered into” [Chappell, 1991: 48]).¹⁷

For these reasons, the argument sustains the notion that “obviousness” derives from the central relational marking of “restrictivity.” The central restrictivity notion not only accounts for the functions parallel among Shishan *lāh*, Mandarin *me*, Cantonese *lo*, and Singapore English *lor* (obviousness, circumstance-necessitated course-of-action,

emotive stances of resignation and indignation, linking two situations), but also allows for a more diverse range of emotive stances than, for example, noted in Wee (2002) and Chappell (1991). The relational restrictivity, characteristic of *lāh*, also helps to imbue interrogative acts with subjectivity. The speaker may express doubt/challenge by seeking confirmation of a restricted state yet simultaneously may present a pre-existing condition that does not lead to such a restricted state of affairs (Example 15). The speaker may also signal foreknowledge, rather than lack of knowledge, in the act of seeking identification of a particular object (Examples 16 and 17).

7. Conclusion

This study argues that *lāh* signals a relational meaning of restrictivity. The speaker, through *lāh*, evokes the understanding that the restriction of state-of-affairs under discussion is such that nothing else is possible due to an external, pre-existing factor. In actuality, *lāh* encodes the speaker's subjective representation of the external world (i.e., a "constraint reality").

The core relational meaning of *lāh* ("nothing else" due to pre-existing, external constraint) gives rise to various emotive expressions (e.g. regret, resignation, indignation, resolve), epistemic assertions (e.g., "obviousness"), and interactional functions (e.g., interrogatives based on prior knowledge, correcting the addressee's false assumption, negative politeness strategies). Such pragmatic extensions parallel the functions of a number of particles in other Southeast Asian languages (e.g. Mandarin Chinese *me*, Cantonese *lo*, and Singapore English *lor*) particularly relating to the marking of "obviousness" and negative emotive stances. While the sense of "obviousness" may be

central to particles such as Mandarin *me* and Singapore English *lor*, in Shishan *lāh*, such epistemic assertion couples with, and builds on, the core meaning that “nothing else” is attainable due to a pre-existing, external constraint. Thus, “obviousness” is only apparent in instances where the constraining external factor is demonstrably known to the addressee, leading to a “self-evident” or “obvious” restricted state-of-affairs. In a similar vein, previous literature on similar particles in Southeast Asian languages (in particular, Mandarin *me* [Chappell 1991] and Singapore English *lor* [Wee, 2002]) focused on negative emotive expressions; however, the range of emotive stances engendered by Shishan *lāh* is demonstrably broader, subject to contextual specifications of the nature of the “constraint reality.”

Viewed from the perspective of language universals, the encoding of a “constrained reality,” marked by *lāh*, is only one instance of many such subjective portraiture of the external world, coded by a broad range of lexical items, constructions, and morph-syntactic means among languages. For instance, Strauss (2002; cf. Strauss, 1994, 2003) illustrated that the Korean auxiliary construction *V-ko malta*, a marker of completive aspect, highlights the end-point of a certain event which occurs despite the speaker or sentential subject’s resistance and conscious attempts at avoiding such an outcome (Strauss, 2002: 158-164). The Korean particle *lato*, ‘even if,’ consisting of the quotative, *la*, and the concessive, *to* ‘even,’ mark a choice that is not the primary choice, but the last choice available under the existing circumstance. As such, the particle conveys “strong determination, urgency, or sometimes desperation on the part of the speaker” (Lee, 1993: 61). These subjective expressions, abundant among grammatical

structures and diverse languages, seem to indicate that the “realis-irrealis oppositions” (Chappell, 1991) constitute an intrinsic human experience and are universally expressed.

As Maynard (1993) noted, “language becomes psychologically, emotionally and socially meaningful only when one recognizes its speaking subject” (Maynard, 1993: 7). The speaker’s epistemic and affective expressions are often provoked by a similar display on the part of the interlocutor, as Givón (2005) observes, “the speaker’s attitude is... never just—not even primarily—about the proposition itself, but rather about the *hearer’s* [emphasis added] attitude towards the proposition as well as toward the speaker” (Givón, 2005: 149). While all languages may have such expressions broadly captured by the expressions of “obviousness,” in Shishan, and arguably in Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese, and Singapore English, the assertion of “obviousness” does not solely express a personal conviction (cf. Quirk et al., 1985). It encodes assertive assessment of the situation/information, *vis-à-vis*, the addressee’s knowledge. When a language formalizes such intersubjective understandings/assertions (through lexico-grammatical means such as particles), these linguistic means become “scripts” (Wong, 2010) that background cultural norms of communication. These particles occur pervasively in oral, casual discourse in Southeast Asian languages. Consequently, a speaker may often express “presumptive” assertions (e.g. “of course,” “as you should have thought so yourself,” “it is obvious that...”) potentially sounding “pushy” from a cultural outsider’s viewpoint (cf. Wong, 2004, 2010). In this sense, Shishan *lāh*, along with similar particles in Southeast Asian languages, jointly pinpoint and lend arguments to support the intersubjective nature of language, and further suggests that such intersubjectivity may have culturally specific features.

Appendix A
Tones of Shishan

Current Notation	Pitch Value (IPA)	Description
<i>nā</i> ‘only’	55	high level legato
<i>ló</i> ‘into’	13	low-rising legato
<i>gǎo</i> ‘nine’	214	falling-rising legato
<i>nà</i> ‘hard to chew’	21	low-falling legato
<i>de</i> copula (no diacritic)	33	mid-level legato
<i>hūk</i> ‘do’	55	high-level staccato
<i>sèʔ</i> ‘money’	21	low-falling staccato
<i>heʔ</i> ‘drop out (of school)’	33	mid-level staccato

Appendix B

Abbreviations

1SG	first person singular
1PL	first person plural
2SG	second person singular
2PL	second person plural
3SG	third person singular
PRT	particle
CLS	classifier
COP	copula
INT	interjection
M	modal verb
NEG	negative
DEM	demonstrative
LOC	location
VOC	vocative
RES	resultative

Appendix C

Transcription Convention

The data transcription follows a modified version of Conversation Analysis transcription conventions (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

Overlapping utterances [

[

Contiguous utterances =

Intervals within and between utterances (.) (2.0)

Untimed pause indicated by a dash –

Characteristics of speech delivery (elongating, falling intonation, rising intonation, increased volume, stress, and contour).

- 1) Increasing volume indicated by CAPITAL LETTERS.
- 2) Elongating indicated by colo:::n
- 3) Pitch peak indicated by ^.

The conversational background indicated by double parenthesis (())

Bold letters indicating features of **interest** to the research.

Figures

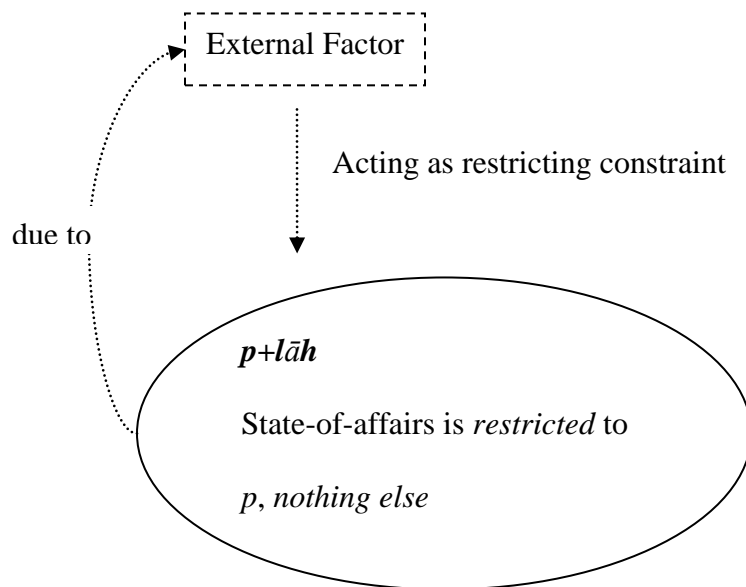


Figure 1: A schematic representation of $p+lāh$ (p =propositional content)

PROTASIS

APODOSIS

1. Dataset: The Volcano Park

[Context: the speaker bought lottery tickets on behalf of her friend. The friend later complained that she should have bought more lottery tickets so to win more.]

Ga'er gě zǐ biǎng giūliǎo

But 3SG ask buy how:much

'But how much he asked me to buy,'

de biǎng giū liǎo lāh

COP buy how:much PRT

is how much I should buy (my choice is constrained by his prior request.)'

2. Dataset: The Dressmaker's Store

[Context: the speaker has previously rejected the dressmaker's business offer to have new clothes made. She uses *lāh* to indicate that her choice is limited to wearing old clothes as she has them anyway]

Rǎ bēi rāh ěydēi ruǎ gēida gēida en, mēng lǐn

I go home now clothes raggy raggy PL have wear

'I, at home, have those old clothes; I have them,

ah lǐn lāh

also wear LĀH

(so) I just wear them (I can't have new clothes made.)'

3. Dataset: The Noodle Restaurant

[Context: The prior speaker mentioned that her in-laws do not have much income. The current speaker suggests that their income should be high if they work for the government.]

Mō dli rōh dānwēi go Vōda en mì

2SG M at unit thing Vōda PL PRT

'If you (here referring to addressee's family-in-law) work for a state-owned company like Voda (=a profitable state-owned company,).'

pong rǎi gōngzi hián lāh

place enable salary much PRT

their salary should be high (they can't be in any other economic states.)'

4. Dataset: the Hairdresser's Shop

[Context: a male passer-by at the shop scoffed at a female customer's suggestion that he get a haircut to look younger; he claimed that good looks are born having nothing to do with self-maintaining tricks like haircuts and shaving. His female friend gave the following *lāh*-marked retort.

lún ōng lūn go bāng bāng, go nèy bāng bāng èy

Shave beard shave thing clean clean thing cheek clean clean PRT

'If (one) shave up (one's) beard, have (one's) cheeks (all shaven and) clean,

de liú wēn chi lāh.

COP look young little PRT

surely (one would) look a little younger (he can't look other ways.)'

Figure 2: Conditional constructions with *lāh*

Tables

Table 1: Frequency of *Lāh*

	<i># of lāh</i>	<i># of words per lāh</i>
Hair Salon	17	2,737:17= 161
Dressmaker's Shop	10	3,001:10= 300
Convenience Store	33	4,431:33= 134
Noodle Restaurant	41	7,592:41= 185
Roast Duck Vendor	31	3,842:31= 124
Fruit Vendor	7	2576:7= 368 ¹⁸
Total	139	--
Average # of words per <i>lāh</i>	--	24,179:139= 174

 Table 2: Utterance Types and Responsive Position vs. Self-Initiated

	<i># of lāh</i>	<i># of lāh</i> -token in responsive turn vs. self-initiated within the utterance type
Declarative	105 (75.5% of 139)	82: 23 (approx. 4:1)
Exclamation	14 (10.1% of 139)	4:10 (=1:2.5)
Suggestion/resolution	12 (8.6% of 139)	10:2 (=5:1)
Interrogative	8 (5.8% of 139)	4:4 (=1:1)
Total	139 (100%)	100 out of 139 (71.9%) in responsive turn

Table 3: *Lāh* and Collocating Markers

a. Co-occurring markers	# of occurrences
Exclusivity and restrictivity (<i>nā</i> ‘only’; <i>pǎh</i> lit. ‘to cease=that’s it’; <i>hìp</i> ‘just, just now’” <i>chóng</i> ‘exactly’; <i>gānsuǐ</i> ‘simply’)	14 out of 44 (31.8%)
P3: <i>Gě hip gāng guā lāosuo lāh.</i> 3sg just say words joke PRT ‘He’s just joking (nothing else. Don’t take it seriously.)’	
b. Intensifiers, superlatives, universal quantifiers (<i>jiabāi</i> ‘really,’ <i>hiǎn</i> ‘very much,’ <i>yín</i> lit. ‘complete=really,’ <i>nāgu</i> ‘truly,’ <i>duō</i> ‘very much,’ <i>n hě</i> ‘not ever,’ <i>zuì</i> , a superlative prefix, <i>shuǎnbū</i> ‘whole, entirety,’ <i>sě de</i> ‘surely is/are’)	13 out of 44 (29.5%)
VR: <i>Hūk go dagǎi niā ló rāh mmm èy:: de jiabāi yū ^^^m lāh.</i> Do thing defecate come into home PRT COP really disgusting PRT ‘A public restroom built near (one’s) home is indeed so disgusting. (It can’t be in any other kind of state.)’	
c. Rhetorical questions dismissing other candidate choice e.g., Example (5a-c), Example (6) and Example (11) discussed earlier	10 out of 44 (22.7%)
d. Markers of absolute certainty (<i>kìm</i> ‘must,’ <i>nēiban</i> ‘must,’ <i>nāng</i> ‘of course’)	4 out of 44 (9.1%)
BC: <i>nēiban óu bēigi lāh.</i> must sit airplane PRT ‘(One) must take the plane (to go from China to the US) (There is no other way).’	
e. Tautology structure: A is A e.g. Example 5(c) discussed earlier	3 out of 44 (6.8%)
Total	44 (31.7% of total 139 tokens) ¹⁹

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¹ A number of representative examples from the current literature are: Cantonese *la, lo, wo, jē(k), a, me* (Chan, 1996; Gibbons, 1980; Luke, 1990; Matthews and Yip, 1994), Dutch *hé, hoor, zeg*, and *joh* (Kirsner and van Heuven, 1996, 1999); English *oh*

(Heritage, 1984), *y'know, well* (Schiffrin, 1987); *actually* (Aijmer, 2002); Finnish *nii, joo, kato* (Sorjonen, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; Kakulinen and Seppänen, 1992); German *auch, ja* (König, 1991); Japanese *yo, no, ne, za, wa* (Cook, 1987, 1990, 1992; Iwasaki, 1993; Maynard, 1993; Oishi, 1985; Okamoto, 1995; Squires, 1994; Suzuki, 1990; Tanaka, 1999; Tsuchihashi, 1983; Uyeno, 1971); Korean *-kwun, -ney, and -tela* (Strauss, 2005; Strauss and Ahn, 2007); Malay *pun* (Goddard, 2001); Mandarin Chinese *ba, a/ya, ne, ma/me, ou* (Chao, 1968; Chappell, 1991; Li and Thompson, 1981; Wu, 2004); Singapore English *lor, la, wut* (Gupta, 1992; Platt and Ho, 1989; Wee, 2002, Wong, 2004); Swahili *e, ka, nge* (Leonard, 1980); pragmatic particles also abound in Vietnamese and Lao (Enfield, 2003, 2007), in Thai (Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom, 2005), in Australian aboriginal languages (Wilkins, 1986), among many others.

² For example, Japanese *yo* (Maynard, 1993), Malay *pun* (Goddard, 2001), Singapore English *wut* (Wong, 2004) signal the speaker's epistemic authority over the topic of discussion; Mandarin *ba* (Li and Thompson, 1981), Swahili *e, ka, nge* (Leonard, 1980), on the other hand, expresses uncertainty and tentativeness. Cantonese *wo* (Luke, 1990), English *oh* (Heritage, 1984), Mandarin *ou* (Wu, 2004) index reception of new/unexpected information; Cantonese *lo* (Yip and Matthews, 2001; Luke, 1990), Mandarin *me* (Chappell, 1991; Chu, 1998), Singapore English *lor* (Platt and Ho, 1989; Wee, 2002), and *la* (Wong, 2004) mark a situation/a piece of information as "presupposed," "obvious" and/or "commonsensical." Cantonese *la* (Luke 1990), Japanese *no* and *ne* (Cook, 1987, 1990, 1992), Mandarin *a* (Wu, 2004), Thai *nà* (Iwasaki

and Ingkaphirom, 2005) suggest certain epistemic and/or affective “common ground” between the speaker and the hearer.

³ To illustrate, English “discourse markers,” such as “well,” “y’know,” “actually,” have been widely studied as indices of discourse relationships (e.g. Aijmer, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987). Wu (2004) showed that Mandarin *ou* may be used to highlight the punch-line of a story (Mandarin *ou*, Wu, 2004); Luke (1990) showed that Cantonese *lo* acts as “completion proposal” (Cantonese *lo*, Luke, 1990) by which the speaker foreshadows the completion of the current conversational task. At the macro level, pragmatic particles index a range of sociocultural identities; for example, utterance-final *eh*, used by Maori men in New Zealand, demarcates in-group vs. out-group (Meyerhoff, 1994); Cantonese *jek* has been associated with feminine speech styles such as diminutive expressions and expressions of cajoling (Chan, 1996).

⁴ An earlier version of the central thesis, proposed in Author (2006), benefited from discussions with Dr. Susan Strauss. The current study represents an extensive re-analysis of the data from the earlier manuscript. One of this study’s reviewers suggested the expression “nothing else” which I adopted in re-wording the central argument.

⁵ As one reviewer indicated, in a language such as Shishan where pragmatic particles occur in abundance, the use of a particle, in casual conversation, would be more typical than not using any particle. The pragmatic effects of zero-particle in an utterance differ among specific communicative situations. In this invented example, the customer is expected to simply announce her food choice; the non-use of final pragmatic particles is likely, plainly informative, as called for by the occasion. However, in other contexts in

which a display of affective stances and subjectivity is expected, the absence of pragmatic particles would be extraordinary and implies the speaker's attitudes: too direct, impolite, curt, etc.

⁶ Utterances of exclamation are not discussed in the current study to avoid repetition. These uses are similar to other utterance types, drawing on the core meaning of relational “nothing else.” Specifically, the speaker uses *lāh* in exclamatory expressions to respond to immediate triggers, in which the speaker literally cries out with emotive assessment (“Response Cry,” Goffman, 1967). This function builds on the meaning of relational “nothing else” in that the triggers are so impressive that only such a strong reaction (with assessment) is possible.

⁷ Shishan is comparable in its abundance of pragmatic particles to Cantonese, which has more than 30 basic utterance-final pragmatic particles and more than 100 combinations (Luke, 1990:1).

⁸ As a dialectal variation of Lingao, Shishan tones are largely the same as the tones identified in Lingao (Hashimoto [1980, p. VIII] identified six tones in Lingao including low-rising legato, high-level legato, mid-level legato, low-falling legato, mid-level staccato and high-level staccato; Liu [2000] identified the same six tones with the addition of a low-falling staccato tone with the pith value of “21”.]) However, Shishan has a distinct falling-rising tone (pitch value “214”), more similar to the falling-rising tone in Mandarin Chinese.

⁹ The study presents a case study of *lāh* without treatment of *lāh* as potentially forming a semantic system with other comparable utterance-final particles in Shishan. An

established fact in linguistic research, particularly in Saussurean sign-based approaches, is that the speaker's [often] subconscious choice of a particular linguistic marker/construction is both choice for this marker, and also a choice over other potential markers within a particular semantic system (cf. Diver's [1964] study of English modal verbs; Garcia's [1975] study on the Spanish pronoun system; Kirsner's [1979] study of Dutch demonstrative adjectives; the broad range of sign-based studies in Contini-Morava, Kirsner, and Rodriguez-Bachiller [2004], *inter alia*). These theoretical convictions notwithstanding, Shishan is an oral language with no prior documentation and empirical research (the current study and Author, 2006; Author, 2009; Strauss and Author, 2009 constitutes first and discourse-based studies of Shishan). Due to this void in historical knowledge, at this stage, we are unable to determine which particles, among the abundant choices, form a system of comparable yet distinct choices to the speaker. This lack, however, suggests the necessity of broadening the knowledge gained by the current study with a subsequent, system-informed approach to view the target form(s) with a broader lens. In addition, the lexical origin of *lāh* remains unidentified, without discernable referential origin. In cases where pragmatic particles have identifiable or well-documented etymological roots in content words (e.g., Finnish *kato*, literally. 'to look,' Hakulinen and Seppänen, 1992; Dutch *hoor*, literally. 'to hear,' Kirsner and Van Heuven, 1996, 1999), such historical insights illuminate the semantic/pragmatic features of the particles in synchronic data and thus help to fine-tune the synchronic analysis. Extensive further research should seek historical documents surrounding Shishan to address these

limitations of the current study. Insightful suggestions from one reviewer identified the role of diachronic perspectives in particle research.

¹⁰ Compound particles, such as *lāh der* and *lāh di no*, are omitted here, following the assumption that compound particles are distinct from single particles (cf. Luke, 1990). Shishan has a mid-level, short homophone, *la* (pitch value “33”), which displays a distinct distributional pattern compared to *lāh*, and is therefore not included in the current study.

¹¹ Luke (1990: 10-11) reported an informal count of Cantonese pragmatic particles: one particle every 1.5 seconds in natural, ordinary conversation. Chappell’s (1991: 40-41) count is one particle every 6 seconds.

¹² These pragmatic particles all mark, in various ways, the speaker’s realization of gaps in views and knowledge between the speaker and the interlocutor, primarily on the basis of the unfolding interaction.

¹³ Matthews and Yip (1994) mentioned four homophones of /lo/, orthographically represented as *lo*, *lō*, *lòh*, and *lok*. The particle in concern is *lō*, /lo/ with a high level tone, although *lòh* also notably marks “impatience” and “of course” in Matthews and Yip (1994:340). Since it does not have extensive discussion or focus in Luke (1990), the homophone of /lo/ is omitted. Another particle, Singapore English *la*, as discussed in Wong (2004), expresses the “commonsensicality” of a proposed course-of-action. This function of Singapore English *la*, albeit similar to Shishan *lāh* to some degree, does not parallel Shishan *lāh* in a substantial way, thus it is omitted from the current discussion.

¹⁴ Gupta (1992) used *lo*, instead of *lor*, to represent the same particle. For consistent reference with Wee (2002), *lo* is replaced with *lor*, as these represent individual researchers' orthographic preferences.

¹⁵ *Me* follows the orthographic representation in Chappell (1991); it contains an unstressed, atonal schwa, a segmental shape undifferentiated from the question particle *ma*, hence the orthographic choice *me* (Chappell, 1991, Footnote 1).

¹⁶ Particle *lo* in Luke (1990) and *lō* in Matthews and Yip (1994) refer to the same *lō*, with the high level tone.

¹⁷ Due to the current void in historical knowledge concerning Shishan, this study is unable to ascertain whether Shishan *lāh*'s functional parallel to other similar particles in Southeast Asian languages is due to language contact situations, indicative of a general developmental trend on the basis of genetic as well as geographic affinity, or simply incidental. As a result, the comparative discussions is unable to assess the extent to which the notion "nothing else" is central, or peripheral, to similar particles in the same geographical region.

¹⁸ The first-hour of the data collected from the fruit vendor's stand contains long periods of silence due to a lack of business traffic on the day of the recording. The vendors did not converse voluminously among themselves either.

¹⁹ The total number of the co-occurring markers/structures is actually 45. One instance represents *lāh* co-occurring with *nā* 'only' and a rhetorical question. This instance is counted in the rhetorical question category, and is not recounted in the restrictivity markers category; hence the listed count is 44.