ABSTRACT

The abundant usage of particles in conversation is one of the most distinctive features of Singapore linguistic culture. It is typical for conversation of Singaporeans to be littered with particles, be it when they are speaking in English or Mandarin.

These particles are loaded with pragmatic meanings. However, the usage of such particles in conversation often makes no sense to foreigners. As such, many studies have been carried out through the years to explicate the meanings and functions these particles carry.

Currently, most studies have investigated the usage of particles in the context of Singapore English (Singlish) conversation, but oblivious to the fact that the phenomenon is also equally significant in Singapore Mandarin conversation.

This paper undertook the study of the particle ‘leh’ in Singapore Mandarin conversation. The aim of this paper is to investigate the inherent meaning of ‘leh’ within the Natural Semantics Metalanguage (NSM) framework, as well as study into the functions which comes with the different lexical tones of ‘leh’, using data from natural conversation. Lastly, the phonetic changes of ‘leh’ in Singapore Mandarin will also be examined.