

THE STUDY OF THE INDONESIAN PRAGMATIC PARTICLE *SIH*

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Abstract: Indonesian is a relatively particle-rich language used mostly in casual speech. However, the study on the pragmatic functions of the language is very few and indebted much solely to the works of Ikranagara (1975), Sari (2008), and of Wouk (1998 & 2001). The present study aims to need to extend other functions of the particle *sih* in particular providing wider range of pragmatic functions than the previous work did. The data of the study derived from YouTube videos of live Indonesian unscripted talk show; and thus the conversations occur naturally during the program. The results reveal that marking an interrogative statement with *sih* following WH-words implies that the speaker emphasizes his main inquiry (e.g. 'where' emphasizes location) and urges the recipient to answer appropriately. Further, the study extends Sari (2008) and Wouk's (2006) findings that *sih* is not only used to emphasize the topic or main point of WH-interrogative statement, but also it applies to declarative statement.

Keywords: *Indonesian language, pragmatic functions, particles, sih.*

INTRODUCTION

Introductorily speaking, Bahasa Indonesia (henceforth: Indonesian) is a variety of standardized Malay that serves as a *lingua-franca* and is nationally recognized as an official language in Indonesian archipelago. Currently, it is spoken by nearly 160 million citizens, 140 million of whom speak it as an L2 after the local languages spoken among their communities. As a national language, Indonesian is used in educational institutions and governmental offices, while local languages are mostly used at home and in specific community gatherings, festivals, or ceremonies. Furthermore, Ikranagara (1975) described that it was *Betawi*, a dialect initially spoken by Jakartans that has much influenced casual speech of Indonesian. Presumably, it is due to the increasing number of TV programs starred by *Betawi-speaking* actors/actresses, that therefore the variant of Indonesian they speak may rapidly spread to other Indonesian speakers in various regions.

Despite the fact that Indonesian is a relatively particle-rich language used mostly in casual speech, this specific topic has remained less studied until recently. To the best of my knowledge, there have been three researchers to date who have studied Indonesian particles, Ikranagara (1975), Wouk (1998, 2001, & 2006), Sari (2013), and Irham (2018) particularly in Madurese. Ikranagara seemed to be the pioneer in conducting a cross-linguistic analysis on a series of Indonesian particles (*kek, kok, kan, ah, ye(ya), sih, dong, and deh*) used in the script of folk play "Nyai Dasime" in the Betawi dialect. Besides mainly exploring lexical meanings of the particles in statements, orders and questions based on the context in the play, Ikranagara's work also presents some of their equivalents or counterparts in English. In the summary of his research (Ikranagara, 1975; pp. 105-106), he divides the basic meanings of the particles into two categories: the particles *kok, kek, ah* are used to express the speaker's feelings about a

certain proposition, and the particles *kan*, *ye(ya)*, *sih deh*, *dong* indicate the violations of conversational postulates which have implications on politeness. Meanwhile, Wouk's (1998 & 2001) papers investigated the particles *ya* and *kan* in more detailed based on the recordings on the casual conversation of Indonesian. Overall, she draws a conclusion that the particles *ya* and *kan* are used equally by both male and female speakers to build the solidarity in casual conversation of Indonesian. Additionally, Wouk (2006) analyzed the use of emotive (e.g. *aduh*, *wah*, *astaga*) and emphatic (e.g. *deh*, *sih*, *nih*) particles for apologizing in Lombok variant of Indonesian. Most recent study, furthermore, is conducted by Sari (2013) who analyzed the prosodic aspect of particle *sih* in Indonesian corpora.

At larger context, studies on pragmatic particles in conversation have been pervasive in the past years. For instance, the analyses of 'well' and 'now' (Fraser, 1990; Aijmer, 2002; Defour, 2007) revealed that they are able to carry pragmatic meanings as "interpersonal function" (Traugott, 1999: 180) or as "topic changer" (Aijmer, 2002: 57-58). Besides, the research of the particle 'oh' and its locus in the conversation has been made explicit in several works (Heritage, 1984, 1998, 2013; Schiffrin, 1987). Heritage (2013) further emphasizes that the particle 'oh' can occur in first (as opening), second (as a response), and a third 'peripheral' position (as closing).

The present study is aimed at exploring the Indonesian particles *sih*. The selection is based on the fact that the particle is frequently used in spoken Indonesian according to the previous analyses (e.g. Ikranagara, 1975; Wouk, 1998; Sari, 2013); yet few of the pragmatic functions apparently need to be criticized and can be extended to express other functions depending on the contexts. More specifically, my analysis is mainly aimed at providing wider range of pragmatic functions of the particle *sih* as an extension to and evaluation for what have been suggested in the previous works.

The data used in this analysis are YouTube videos of live Indonesian unscripted talk show; therefore the conversations occur naturally during the programs. The cues of the spontaneity of conversations in the videos can be seen, for examples, from the laughter and

hesitations made by the participants of the talks. The number of participants who involve in the talks is ranging from two, three, or even more participants.

The topics of the selected talks are related to the personal life of the participants and the other trending issues in Indonesia. I will limit myself to present the appropriate excerpts of talks as well as their contexts and provide their English translations. However, I will not quantify the occurrences of my data since the chief goal of this analysis is to provide additional functions and, if appropriate, argue against the current notions surrounding functions of particle *sih*.

DISCUSSION

Previous Analyses of Particle Sih

As cited in the introduction, there are a few scholars who have studied *sih* until the present time. Ikranagara (1975) pioneered a study on the folk script reveals the basic meanings of eight particles, including *sih*. His study shows that *sih* is used to express 'what is said by the speaker is true' in the declarative statement. Additionally, when used in interrogative statement, *sih* gives sense that the speaker is not really seeking an answer to his question or not assuming that the speaker must reply to it, which is then literally translated as 'I wonder'. Pertaining to this result, he emphasizes that the use of *sih* in question violates one of the basic conversational rules that the question must be answered.

Further, another study of *sih* is carried out by Wouk (2006) who analyzes its functions for apologizing language in Lombok. She describes that *sih* can help intensify the force of apology in conversation. The most recent study of *sih* is, perhaps, conducted by Sari (2013). She mainly analyzes the prosodic aspect of the particle and reveals that *sih* has two main intonations; rising and falling. *Sih* with rising intonation mainly occurs in the WH-interrogative statement which gives sense of emphasizing a specific matter being questioned and urgency for the recipient to come up with an answer to it. Meanwhile, falling intonation is used to emphasize the speaker's certainty of the topic in conversation.

Although it occurs very often in casual Indonesian, particle *sih* appears to have no

equivalent in English, particularly, and therefore remains unstudied comparatively across languages. In contrast to *sih*, question tag-like particles, for example, seem to be functionally comparable across languages. Enfield and colleagues (2009) have studied Sentence-Final Particles (SFP) across three languages (Lao, Dutch, and Tzeltal) and show that the particles such as *bi* (in Tzeltal); *bòò*, *vaa*, and *nòq* (in Lao), *toch* and *hè* (in Dutch) can function as agreement seekers or a request for verification and confirmation for the speaker's assertion. Wouk (1998) also employs a comparative approach to study Indonesian *kan* as tag-like and 'you know' particle.

Functions of *Sih* Contrastive Marker

Example (1) is a talk between DC and NS about NS's life as a housewife (also mother) and famous TV presenter. NS told DC that she just lost her baby, and then DC asked her whether she blamed God for losing her premature baby-daughter, who died after a few hours of her birth. In this responsive statement, instead using the responsive marker either '*iya/ya*' 'yes' or '*tidak/nggak*' 'no' in English to reply DC's question, she directly made a statement that she blamed herself for this loss by marking *sih* finally. In this context, *sih* is used to contrast and implicitly negate the DC's proposition since on one hand it is morally unacceptable to affirm the DC's assertion and, on the other hand, it is also fully uneasy to put blame on herself considering the maximum efforts she had already made. In other words, *sih* can be used in responsive statement to contrast the asker's proposition when the replier is in uneasy and dilemmatic situation to respond.

- (1) DC: Do you blame God at that time?
 NS: Saya menyalahkan diri sendiri
 sih.
 I blame self alone
 sih.
 DC: Do you blame God at that time?
 NS: (No), I blame myself for it
 instead.

Expressing Emphaty

Another function of *sih* is expressing an emphatic statement and the speaker's feeling. It is typically expressed either in

lowered or high intonation, depending on how much speaker's emotion being evoked. As illustrated in example (2), DC is told by D that NS is friendly. However, DC assumes that NS was pretending to care and be friendly to D because NS might not have another friend. NS' statement marked by *sih* here expresses sense of emphaty if it were really the case happening to her.

- (2) DC: Mungkin gak punya teman, makanya
 liat kamu 'wah ini bisa jadi
 teman gue ini'.
 Maybe not have friend thus
 see you intr. this can become
 friend I this
 NS: Kasian amat *sih*
 Pity really *sih*
 DC: (she) might have no other friend;
 therefore (she) made
 friendship with you.
 NS: how pity I was (if it were really true).

Speaker's View of Truth

Example (3) illustrates that *sih* seems to give sense of uncertainty and doubt of the truth of the hearsay. In the last segment of the talk show, DC invites another guest star who knows NS' teenage life. Before revealing who the next guess is, DC tells NS that the next guess, according to hearsay, knows her well. By marking 'hearsay' with *sih*, it enables DC to doubt the truth of the information he heard. Comparing example (3) to (4), it seems that *sih* expresses the speaker's viewpoint of the truth of information.

- (3) DC: ini kenal dekat katanya
 sih...katanya...
 This know close hearsay
 sih hearsay
 NS: siapa...siapa...?
 Who who
 DC: this (guest) knows you well
 according to hearsay (but I am
 not sure).
 NS: who is he?
 (4) DC: saya dengar-dengar
 dari...dari...e...katanya lo
 ngefan banget sama R?
 I hear.repeated from from
 e hearsay you fan really
 with R?
 LM: [laugh]...R..iya suka, lucu.
 [laugh] R yes like cute.

DC: I heard from hearsay that you are really a fan of R, right?
 LM: [laugh]..R..yes I am, (he is) cute.

Emphasis

It seems that *sih* can also serve as emphasis in either interrogative or declarative statements. When WH-question is marked by *sih*, it emphasizes the point being questioned and, thus, it urges the recipient to reply the speaker's question. Meanwhile, marking *sih* into a declarative statement seems to emphasize the truth of the assertion. In example (5) DC and LM involve in conversation about the gossip in the social media that LM is close to a younger rising-actor. Therefore, DC poses some questions for LM and emphasizes that he urges her to come up with answers. In example (6), DC and LM involve in a talk about the emerging trend of match-making agency. DC tells her that the next guest will talk about it. Eventually, LM emphasizes that she does not need such an agency because, as she previously tells LM, she has a boyfriend now.

- (5) 1 DC: Apa lucunya *sih*?
 What cute *sih*?
 2 LM: Cakep
 handsome
 3 DC: Apa cakepnya *sih*?
 What handsome *sih*
 (1.0)
 4 LM: Kenapa *sih*?
 Why *sih*?
 5 DC: ya nggak apa-apa
 Yeah not what.repeated
 (6) DC: Bintang tamu saya ini
 kerjanya adalah
 mencarikan pasangan
 Star guest I this
 work is find
 couple
 LM: Oh gitu..yah, saya udah
 nggak perlu *sih*.
 Int. that yeah I already
 not need *sih*
 DC: My next guest star works
 as a match-making agency.
 LM: Oh..but I really do not
 need it (now).

In the line 1, 3, and 4 in the excerpt above show that *sih* seems to serve as emphasis to the main point being questioned

and urgency for the recipient to provide appropriate answers to it.

Wonder

The following example illustrates that *sih can* express a sense of the speaker's wonder or surprise in conversation. Example (7) has similar context with (6) in which LM thinks that DC might need a match-making agency to help him find a couple as he got divorced recently. The use of *sih* here provides sense of the speaker's wondering of the unexpected statement or condition from his conversant. It is quite common in casual Indonesian that particle *kok* 'surprise' occurs together with *sih* to express the speaker's wondering.

- (7) LM: Mungkin [pointing to DC] perlu
 kayaknya.
 Maybe need
 seem
 DC: kok anda tau *sih*
 Part. You know *sih*.
 LM: perlu
 Need
 LM: (I think) you need it
 DC: (oh, how) you know it? (I just
 wonder and get surprised)
 LM: you do

Positions of Sih

It is quite difficult to map a definite position of *sih* and associate it with a particular function in the conversation. However, in general, *sih* can occur in the final position of a statement as in example (1) repeated here as (8), or follow WH-words (9), or occur between predicate and object as in (10). Although I do not find its occurrences in my data, it is quite common that *sih* also can occur in initial position, especially for Eastern Java variant of spoken Indonesian as illustrated in a fabricated example (11). When *sih* occurs in such a slot, it provides sense of the speaker's surprise.

- (8) NS: Saya menyalahkan diri sendiri
sih.
 I blame self alone *sih*.
 '(No), I blame myself for it
 instead'
 (9) DC: Sebenarnya dilarang kenapa *sih*?
 Actually forbid why *sih*?

- 'Actually, why are you forbidden (to love her)?' (I urge you to answer me)
- (10) D: Mungkin orangtua pengennya *sih* yang terbaik ya.
 Maybe parents want
sih rel. best yeah
 'parents might want the best (man for me)'
- *(11) *Si*h, cantik anak kamu ya.
*Si*h beautiful child you yeah.
 'your daughter is beautiful right' (I am surprised!)

CONCLUSION

Ikranagara (1975) has suggested that particle *sih* is mainly used to express 'what is said by the speaker is true' in declarative statement, which corresponds to my finding in the present paper. Furthermore, he also finds that, when *sih* is used in interrogative statements or when it occurs following WH-words, it gives sense that the speaker is merely wondering about the subject under question and he does not require that the recipient answer his question. In contrast, based on my data, I will argue that marking an interrogative statement with *sih* which follows WH-words can give the sense that the speaker emphasizes his main inquiry (e.g. 'where' emphasizes location) and urges the recipient to answer appropriately.

My data confirm the functions of *sih* suggested by the previous works and offer another functional description of it. My finding extends Sari (2008) and Wouk's (2006) finding that *sih* is not only used to emphasize the topic or main point of WH-interrogative statement, but also it applies to declarative statement as in examples (5) and (6). Besides, the present analysis also confirms Wouk's (2006) conclusion that *sih* serves as emphatic particle as in example (2) and can be used to express the speaker's view of the information truth, as illustrated in examples (3) and (4). Eventually, the present study also shows that *sih* can be used as a contrastive marker when the speaker feels uneasy to fully negate or accept his partner's proposition as illustrated in example (1).

Generally, in relation to the positional distribution in the talks, *sih* can occupy three main slots. *Si*h can assume final position of a statement or independent clause, come after

WH-words in interrogatives, or occur between predicate and object. Although my data and previous studies do not suggest that *sih* can occur in initial position, Indonesian spoken in a few regions in East Java shows flexibility of *sih* to occupy the left-most periphery, as illustrated in a fabricated example (11). When *sih* occurs in initial position, it typically expresses the speaker's surprise in conversation.

In sum, the present study has confirmed and extended functional descriptions of *sih* in spoken Indonesian. The use of *sih* enables the speaker to emphasize the topic in conversation, express his views and assessment of the information truth, and express the speaker's feeling into the conversation. Therefore, it is obvious that understanding the functions of *sih* and other Indonesian discourse particles will enable speakers of the language to achieve communicative goals in their spoken communication.

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