

<b>Headline</b>	The Sunday Times put five businesses to the English test		
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## The Sunday Times put five businesses to the English test

### Haagen-Dazs at Suntec City Mall

Before I even opened my mouth, friendly Chinese sales assistant Helen Chen asked me, in English, if I would like to sample some flavours.

I told her that I was craving for durian ice cream, but she said there was no such flavour before apologising.

She proceeded to recommend two flavours which she explained were "special" because they were both sweet and sour.

When I asked if there was any ongoing discount or promotion, she explained that they had one, but only for those who worked in Suntec.

She also cheerfully gave me directions to the washroom, then the MRT station, even though I left without buying any ice-cream.

[Gracia Chiang](#)

### Food Republic at Suntec City Mall

A middle-aged Chinese woman served me at the drinks counter.

When I asked if they had iced tea, she said "yes" but went on to say something which I could not catch because of her thick accent.

Her Singaporean colleague later explained that they sold only canned iced tea.

I asked if they sold tissue paper and she exclaimed "40 cents", pointing to a basket.

I then asked if there was any discount or promotion and she said "no need", which I took to mean there wasn't any.

For the final test, I asked if she could direct me to the washroom and the MRT station. She looked confused and just shook her head vehemently, waving me away.

[Gracia Chiang](#)

### Giant Tampines

At a halal butchery at hypermart Giant Tampines, I pretended to want some beef. The sole worker behind the counter was a woman from China.

I asked her for the smallest piece of topside steak that she could find, but she did not understand me. She took out a whole tray of beef and signalled to me to point to the piece I wanted.

I asked her for one big piece instead, and asked her to cut it into half. She still could not understand me.

After some gesticulating, she got my drift, but when I asked for an extra plastic bag, she gave me a quizzical look again.

I walked over to the durian section.

I asked a Chinese service staff member, who was selling the durians, how much they cost.

He simply pointed to the figures written in black marker on the styrofoam lids.

I asked him where the durians were from but he did not understand me. With a smile, he said: "My English no good."

[Zureena Habib](#)

### KOPI at Changi Airport's Terminal 3

The English proficiency of foreign workers serving food at this 24-hour foodcourt ranged from non-existent to manageable.

At a vegetarian food stall, my questions about whether the stall was closed, or if the dishes came with rice, were greeted with nothing more than a smile from the Chinese stall assistant.

At least at an Indian food stall, the Chinese stall assistant understood me when I asked if it served prata. She pointed to the other Indian stall next to it and said "prata".

At a dessert stall, I asked a Chinese stall assistant what time it closes, and she replied: "24 hour."

[Zureena Habib](#)

### Takashimaya, Ngee Ann City

My best experience yet was shopping for shoes at this Japanese department store.

I asked a sales staff member, Ms Anny Shi, for grey pumps in a size seven. She promptly got me the right size.

As it did not fit well, I asked her for a 6.5 instead. When she said the store did not have 6.5, I asked her for another colour. She was very apologetic when that, too, was unavailable.

I then asked her where the nearest toilet was and she directed me in perfect English.

Later, I told her that she spoke English well and she told me that she had learnt it in a school in China before coming to Singapore to work. She has been with Takashimaya for six months.

[Zureena Habib](#)