

Headline	What talking you?		
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what talking you?

Columnist **GLORIA CHAN** likes watching **Phua Chu Kang**, but she believes that children should grow up speaking standard English.

Much has been said about the use of Singlish. Although I do speak Singlish sometimes in playful banter with family and friends, I find Singlish words like *wah lau* and *meh* very painful on the ears.

As a child, whenever I punctuated my sentences with *lah*, I would be ticked off by my sister who is 10 years older than me. That didn't stop me completely. My eldest brother, who loved taunting me when we were young, would challenge me to go a whole day without using *lah*.

When my children were learning to talk, I made a conscious effort not to speak to them in Singlish. I wanted them to be fluent in English before they were exposed to Singlish, broken English and other mannerisms, which I knew they would be exposed to once they started going to school.

YOU DO, I COPY * Children at that impressionable age take after the people around them in language, mannerisms, manners and values. Once I came across my younger son, Rudi, standing arms akimbo, saying "what on earth did you do?" to a young neighbour who had spilled a drink on the living room rug. He acted and sounded so much like me! It struck me right there and then that adults should always be mindful of what they say or do in front of their children.

At home, I was a little concerned about my sons picking up broken English from our Sri Lankan maids, who spoke English that was a direct translation of their native dialect.

They said "plenty good" to mean "very good", and "Mummy no come home" when they meant "Mummy is not home yet". But it was amusing how my boys knew how to express themselves in such a way that the maids understood them, and yet were able to go back to speaking proper English when they spoke to us.

PAY UP THE 50-CENT FINE *

When my boys went to primary school, they picked up Singlish and a few foul words along the way – not just from

their friends, but from the school bus driver too. Once, my elder son came back home and asked me the meaning of some foul Hokkien words which the bus driver had uttered when a motorist cut into his path.

Without being schoolmarmish, I let it pass when my two boys teased

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and bantered with each other in Singlish. I knew that when it came to the crunch, they could distinguish English from Singlish. But I banned them from using terms like *wah lau* and *meh* and imposed a 50-cent fine each time they uttered them! The ban was also extended to our neighbours' kids when they came over to play.

I am always impressed by children who speak well as I find that they also tend to be well mannered. My take on this is that parents who take pains to check on the way their children speak, also check on their manners. This may sound superficial, but as I always tell my children – first impressions are important. It gets you past the first hurdle at job interviews, for example.

I believe there is a time and place for Singlish. And it's only fun and funny if you know Singlish from English and use it in the right company and occasion. Even then, no *wah lau* and *meh* for me! **YP**

