

Headline	What kills good English		
Date	5 July 2003		
Media Title	The Straits Times	Section	Forum
Page No	30	Size	5colx12cm

What kills good English

I REFER to the report, "KISS the big words goodbye" (ST, July 3). If local speech, in whatever language, is good enough, why are broadcast presenters like news readers and disc jockeys expected to pronounce clearly well-chosen words in proper sentences and have a pleasant accent?

Why can't Singlish with its sloppy pronunciation, imprecise word choice and staccato accent — and its other-language counterparts — be accepted professionally?

Speaking good English to some means rolling the "r" in a ridiculous "North American" accent. To others, it is displacing short words with longer ones like "buy" with "purchase". The "Simple

English" movement began in the West to facilitate communication. I am glad our Speak Good English Movement is on the bandwagon.

In speech or writing, good language is simply grammatically-structured short sentences with well-chosen words that are understood by most. Bombast is all about the speaker/writer's ego that doesn't help the listener/reader. It is usually poor communication.

Good speech is harder as writing doesn't demand vocal performance.

Even well-paced and grammatical speakers suffer the Singlish mainstays of "already", "got", "never" and "stay". Schools don't seem to teach that "already" and "got" are overly misused in Singapore. The Singlish

"I got eat" and "I eat already" should be "I ate" and "I have eaten" respectively.

Other misusages are "alphabet" to refer to a "letter" of the 26-letter alphabet and "slang" (local jargon) to mean an accent.

"I never go to the toilet" is absurd as "never" means "not even once", very different from "do/did not". Asking "Where do you stay?" doesn't mean "Where do you live?" as "stay" refers to temporary accommodation, like at a hotel.

A great upgrade would be achieved if schools and parents can wean locals off these few "hardcore killers" of good English. There must be conviction in overturning a kampung attitude of "can understand okay already" before word precision is

manifest.

Precise pronunciation is another aspiration. An SIA flight attendant once asked if I wanted "laksa-ner" when he meant "lasagne". Ms Bernice Wong, our Miss Universe Singapore, appealed on TV as ambassador to The Courage Fund for "help in elevating their (Sars victims and families) pain". She meant "uh-lee-vee-ay-ting" (alleviating) their pain, not raising it.

A habit of approximating sounds took its toll when a senior travel agent read "Nee-gah-rah Falls" from a Canadian itinerary. He had confused the Malay word "negara" (nation) with "Nie-air-gruh" (Niagara). If he's consistent, I suppose his "Vie-air-gruh" (Viagra) sounds like

"Vee-gah-rah". Other liberties we take are to pronounce "pizza" and "Pisa" (the leaning tower) as "pee-zah" instead of differentiating "peed-zah" from "Pee-zah". "Third" sounds like "turd" (a piece of excrement) without the "th" sounded.

Good speech in any language doesn't mean a fancy accent. Paramount is a friendly pace, fully enunciated syllables, grammatical phrasing and apt word choice.

To upgrade from dumbed-down speech, we need to curb an impatience that spits out words unempathetically as well as a catagelophobic (fearful of ridicule) aversion to upgraded speech.

**ANTHONY LEE
MUI YU**