

Headline	It all starts with teachers		
Date	16 July 2003		
Media Title	The Straits Times	Section	Forum
Page No	18	Size	3colx16cm

It all starts with teachers

THE "Speak Good English Movement" will fail if Singapore cannot find a critical mass of competent teachers who can halt the worsening rot of the English language.

This has to start from preschool. Entrenched poor English usage, which have been perpetuated through generations, will take at least a generation or two to undo.

Teachers in all subjects must speak correct Standard English which, unfortunately, is not the case. Many preschool and kindergarten teachers, whether teaching music, arithmetic, art or English, will most likely speak to the children in Singlish.

Children must stop being taught "one, two, tree" instead of "one, two, three" and the letter "r" as "ahrer".

Teachers must also stop perpetuating wrong usage by saying "Who sends you to school?" when they mean "Who takes you to school?" and "Let me see how is your work" when it should be "Let me see how your work is".

These examples have become today's "Singapore-style Standard English" — among some teachers, radio and television presenters, journalists and even ministers. I have heard TV announcers saying "Empress Doo-way-ger" instead of

"Empress Dowager" and "pree-day-ter" instead of "predator".

Even local journalists and editors do not seem to know the meaning of "wanting". "Wanting" means lacking of or in need of. "I have been wanting to come to your house" is wrong usage. It should be "I want to come to your house".

Some TV commercials are riddled with poor pronunciation and grammatical mistakes along the same lines.

I find it inexcusable and insulting that foreign professional announcers seem to refuse to pronounce local names properly, eg, Tanjong Pagar, Kallang and Padang have been mangled into Tang-jong Pergar, Ker-laang and Pair-daang! I am sure they would take the trouble to learn how to pronounce Champs-Elysées if France gave them a job.

Go to any shopping centre in Orchard Road which has announcements over the public-address system about sale items available on the third level, and you will always hear — "come to sale on "lavatory". I am sure this has made a great story about Singapore for a tourist to bring home.

A visitor to Singapore will also be very amused when his "How do you do?" is answered

with a "I'm fine, thank you". The correct response is "How do you do?"

Which brings me to gracious or polite usage. Just because the words "shit" and "fart" are listed in the dictionary, it does not mean we should allow our children to think that such crass language is acceptable. However, they will certainly think so when they see such words in our national newspapers and hear them on television programmes.

So, how are we going to improve the state of the English language? Who is going to teach our teachers who are teaching our children who are the parents of tomorrow?

To undo all the wrong pronunciation and grammar that our children are being subjected to, teachers who know that they are wanting in Standard English should make the effort to teach themselves first, through English improvement books or courses run by the British Council, etc.

Is this failure to take personal initiative a lack of pride and dedication in teachers today? In my day, the English used by most teachers was certainly a cut above that of many teachers today.

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