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ALLABUZZABOUT

This guy in the US was in a coma for 19 years and he woke up last month — just like that. Maybe he heard Gurmit's Sars rap: "Uncle in a coma/ Better faster wake up lahl"

What's interesting was that he went into the coma after a road accident on Friday, June 13, and came out of it on the same date 19 years later. Even better, when he woke up, he managed to utter a few words he remembered. They might have been 'thirsty', 'bathroom' and 'oops'. He probably didn't utter words like 'Starbucks', 'wassup', 'ho', 'website' and 'weapons of mass destruction', which didn't exist 19 years ago. But within days, he was forming phrases and eventually got back to speaking proper English again.

In Singapore, of course, there are many people who still can't speak decent English even though they have NOT been in a coma for 19 years. It's not about pronunciation, vocabulary or even grammar — it's all about syntax. Singlish is one reason why our English syntax is all screwed up; Singlish, like a drunk George W Bush, mangles the language.

Perhaps that's the reason why yet another campaign has been created in Singapore: the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM). Note the use of the last word 'movement', which differs from 'campaign' in that it's a 'simpler' word. The movement aims to get people to speak simple English, and in the recent SGEM TVC, Pierre is seen proposing to Andrea. Yes, them.

His words to her, and we quote verbatim: "Dear, bearing in mind all the minefields that we've negotiated since we embarked on our liaison, and seeing as to how congenial we've become on a quotidian basis, I was ruminating on perhaps celebrating our nuptial sometime this year."

To which a quizzical Andrea asks: "Are you t-r-y-i-n-g to ask me something?"

Seriously, if Pierre said that to me, I would be thinking, "Geez, I'm being proposed to by an out-of-work copywriter." Of course, to Andrea's rescue comes a helpful voiceover: "You don't have to use

SPEAK ENGLISH GOOD

This article is written in good, simple English, and, DAVID FUHRMANN-LIM promises, it is free of big words.



big words to speak good English."

That's right — you don't. But where were the big words? Nuptial — is that a big word? Congenial — is that a big word? What exactly is a 'big' word? Does it need to contain a 'q' or an 'x'? On what basis is a word promoted from medium to big? Does it need steroids? What about a word like 'nitid', which means 'lustrous'? Is that a big word? Or is it a small word trying to be a big Scrabble word?

Or is it the number of syllables? 'Liaison' has three syllables — is that a big word? Or does it need four syllables — like 'ruminating' — before it becomes a big word? Maybe five, like 'negotiated'?

Everyone who's ever encountered a parking lot attendant knows what 'negotiated' means: "Auntie don't summon me lah, I just went to buy coupon. I don't have already, then lucky that car there got one. Don't like this lah, auntie. Really one!"

The Old/Middle English word 'chaffer' means the same thing — to bargain, negotiate — and it only has two syllables. So scrap that big word thing: If you can't define it, don't use it. Here are some simple words for you: vacuous copulating concept.

In Singapore, everyone understands each other well enough: Drivers give each other the finger, you draw a circle in the air when you want your restaurant cheque, etc. Of course it doesn't hurt to speak well. The thing is, these campaigns all have an economic rationale. If we speak well, we can communicate smoothly with the thousands of gay foreign talent rushing to work in Singapore now that it's okay to be pink.

Of course it's also important that we all speak good English so that we can help the *Amazing Race* teams should they ever pass through here again. It's important to speak good English so that we can understand important signboards: "Do Not Queue Here. There Is Nothing Going On. Really." It's important to speak good, simple English so that an English referee will understand us when we shout, "You are stoopidd!!" — all grammar, tenses and syntax present and accounted for — when we really mean, "Referee kayul!"

Surely it is incongruous to have the SGEM ad on air at the same time as the Sars rap: So are we gonna speak good English, or not? ■