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# Global English

## Singaporeans urged to speak a widely intelligible form of the language

by Jason Chong

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**A**LL of us know the importance of English to students in Singapore. Good English speaking habits remain important for working adults, especially in these tough times when companies are watching the bottom line.

Said Mr Song Chi-Ho, director of the Wall Street Institute (WSI) here: "In a competitive job market, proficient English speakers stand out."

He added that English is not only Singapore's language of business and commerce, it is also "one of the most important contributors to the country's economic and political success".

This has become "even more important" with the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between Singapore and the United States, added Mr Song. On the global front, non-English speaking countries in Asia are starting to see the importance and advantage of learning the language.

Mr Christopher Chia, a senior education consultant at Raffles Educational Services,

said: "I notice that many Singaporeans speak grammatically-incorrect English, in Singlish and with a smattering of Mandarin. This will not help us if we want to go global."

He added that people from countries such as China and Hong Kong are brushing up their English skills earnestly.

This could be the reason why some Singaporeans are sitting up and questioning their grasp of the language. At the WSI, almost half of the enquiries it receives are from Singaporeans. Established in 1972 and with more than 400 centres in 20 countries, the institute's first branch in the South-east Asian region is in Singapore.

Besides the increasing awareness of the importance of English, Mr Song said that it makes sense to open a centre here as it is not only centrally-located in the region but it is also a "melting pot of diverse cultures".

He said: "Population-wise, there is a high demographic representation where English is not the first language that is used."

At the British Council here, about 10,000

adult learners take its courses and workshops each year, noted the deputy director of its teaching centre, Ms Linda Hanington.

She said: "Although most Singaporeans have been through an English language system, they want to improve their language and skill levels to respond to the increasing focus on good English communication in the life and work context."

The British Council is no stranger when it comes to English language courses and it has been contributing to the annual Speak Good English Movement campaign.

It also conducts a "Singlish to English" course.

Ms Hanington said: "Singapore has many excellent users of English but many others find it difficult to distinguish between and to choose forms of English that enable effective communication in a wide range of contexts."

She explained that, to be understood more effectively, Singaporeans should speak "a widely intelligible form of English". She added that Singlish is a "non-standard form."

"Communication problems arise when the form of English used is not standard and unintelligible to the listener," she said.

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