

<b>Headline</b>	Distinguish between the spoken and the formal		
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# Distinguish between the spoken and the formal

IT IS that time of the year when the Speak Good English Movement sends us its timely reminder.

In the grand scheme of things, it is imperative that we move beyond slang in order to make ourselves understood globally.

But an outcome of the campaign that I would loath to see is Singaporeans speaking in a stilted and contrived manner. After all, conversational English is structurally different from formal English.

Formal English, according to English Grammar For Dummies, is used “to impress, to create a tone of dignity, or to provide a suitable role model for someone who is still learning”, while conversational English is meant to be used “between equals”.

If we were to go around speaking formal English with our foreign friends on all occasions, we would come across as being pretentious rather than sincere.

Throw all the “lors” and “lahs” out the window by all means but refrain from doing the same to words like “kiasuism” and “obiang”.

If preserved rationally, such words from our heritage lexicon may one day join the ranks of “gung-ho” and “chop suey”.

In the long run, in order to keep our identity intact while using English as the lingua franca, English should be a transplant rather than a mere import in our culture.

*Lai Yew Chan*