

Headline	Good English used to be every teacher's business		
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Good English used to be every teacher's business

I COULD not agree more with Professor Koh Tai Ann that Singaporeans "need to speak an English that is closer to international Standard English".

The sliding standards of the language are due largely to a change in Singapore educationists' attitude towards the use of correct English. During my days in school, it was not only the English teachers but also all other subject teachers who came down on us for faulty English. It was everyone's business.

Today teachers focus only on procuring good marks for the pupils and do not put themselves to the bother and expense of correcting the pupils' grammar and English.

To compound the situation, we have insidious influences like SMS and TV programmes, which only help Singlish and bad English to get deeply entrenched.

Unless the Government makes a more concerted effort than just hosting the yearly "Speak Good English" cam-

paign, the standards of our spoken and written English will fall even more drastically.

Much as I agree with Prof Koh on the issue of speaking good English, I am, however, not with her on some solecisms she mentioned in the interview: for instance, she was reported to have said that "Taking your lunch" and "We take dinner" are "not found in Standard English".

Although I quite agree that "take lunch/dinner" may not be very common, it, indeed, is Standard English.

Another issue that I do not take kindly to is Prof Koh's views on "kindly", which she said Singaporeans have been using quite wrongly. "Kindly"

is used both as an adjective ("a kindly smile") and as an adverb ("he smiled kindly").

In one of its many adverbial uses it serves as a synonym of "please": "Kindly order me a conveyance". A related use of "kindly" is cited by Fowler: "You are kindly requested to return the enclosed form within 30 days".

Some people take exception to "kindly" on the grounds that it sounds imperious, formal and condescending but Longman Guide To English Usage says that this "objection seems unreasonable". Singaporeans' usage of "kindly" is, thus, not wrong.

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