

Headline	Don't mimic Westerners, let local accent be heard		
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Page No	H8	Size	3colx

H8 | FORUM

» GOOD ENGLISH

Don't mimic Westerners, let local accent be heard

I REFER to the recent debate on speaking good English.

More than the pragmatic reasons that guide the Government's bid to encourage Singaporeans to speak good English, one of the intangible benefits of doing so is that it will help augment our sense of cultural confidence.

Many of us have come across Singaporeans who mimic foreign accents when speaking to Westerners.

Indeed, in my first weeks as an undergraduate in the United States, I found myself making a conscious effort to "evolve" my accent, as I feared I would not be understood by my peers and professors.

Some might put it down to "mental colonisation", a post-colonial scar precipitating the assumption that everything in the Western world is superior and therefore desirable.

But for many Singaporeans, mimicking a Western accent represents a lack of confidence in our English ability. Even our best English students are not spared this inferiority complex.

Growing up in Singapore, we have come to associate our accent with Singlish. Speaking with a Singaporean accent often necessitates the use of "lahs" and "lors".

It has become almost unnatural for us to speak good English and yet maintain a local accent. It seems as if only politicians, broadcast journalists and English teachers have the ability to combine the two elements of good English and local accent.

Our mental image of what constitutes good English is conditioned and indelibly influenced by Western media. When we meet a Westerner, our reflex action is to switch our accent as we make a conscious attempt to speak good English.

Our ambassadors, politicians and many notable Singaporeans have proven that good English spoken with a

NO PROBLEM BEING UNDERSTOOD

Many notable Singaporeans have proven that good English spoken with a local accent can be understood anywhere in the world.

local accent can be understood anywhere in the world.

I do not recall any prominent international Singapore figure who speaks with a foreign accent.

Perhaps what stops us from speaking with a local accent when conversing with a foreigner is that we subconsciously associate our accent with an inferior brand of English.

This does not have to be so. Our English-based education system should have prepared us adequately to speak and write proper English.

Singapore aspires to be a global city. A global city must have global citizens. Being a global citizen does not mean we adopt the practices, ways and accents of others.

It is about contributing something to the melting pot, be it our food or customs.

Singlish is a product of our local melting pot, but it will never be part of the global melting pot because we lack the critical mass and leverage to export it as a popular "language" or slang.

This is the reality of being a small nation. We can, however, contribute to this melting pot by speaking good English in our unique Singaporean accent.

We will take a small step towards being a more confident people. Let our accent be heard!

Leon Tham Ngiap Liang