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Speak Good English Movement to target service, retail sectors this year

In a bid to raise customer service standards here, the Speak Good English Movement this year will target those working in the service and retail sectors.

Key to this is a new national programme launched by the Singapore Retailers' Association called Service English for Retail Professionals, comprising a series of courses for frontline staff to learn how to communicate better with customers.

Singapore Retailers Association's Executive Director Lau Chuen Wei elaborates.

"Eighty per cent of customers are still Singaporeans, and some of the retail staff feel that they can get by without speaking standard English, some of them take it as a transient job, so it's like why should I...Instead of waiting for people to come back to tell us whether it is important or not, we say that it is important."

It is targetting foreigners and older Singaporeans who are not fluent in English.

This push is part of this year's more aggressive approach in getting people to speak better English, by providing more resources and programmes.

For instance, members of the public will soon be able to test their language proficiency and sign up for workplace literacy classes for free at selected libraries, thanks to a new partnership between the Workforce Development Agency and National Library Board.

At the grassroots level, chairman of the Speak Good English Movement, Goh Eck Kheng, has also urged speakers of good English to be 'activists',

by not alternating between standard English and grammatically-incorrect English when interacting with those who are not as proficient.

"Personally, I also would like to see all of us who can speak good English become role models for those who cannot, because if you don't hear English being spoken all the time, you'll never learn."

This year's campaign will be officially launched by Minister Lim Boon Heng, Prime Minister's Office, on Aug 26 at Metro, The Paragon.