

Publication :	Straits Times
Date :	10 September 2006
Headline:	English as it is broken

# ENGLISH AS IT IS BROKEN

Not sure what is good English and what is not? Write to The Sunday Times and we will get master teachers to answer your queries. This is a weekly series in support of the Speak Good English Movement.

THIS week, we look at some words that are sometimes misspelt, often with hilarious results, probably because we do not pronounce them properly.

Take a look at the following signs sent in by readers and see if you can spot the errors.



### Pay close attention

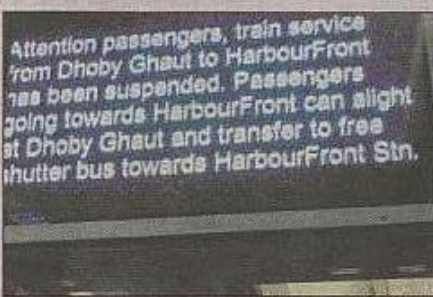
MOST of you would have spotted the misspelt "Friday", but did you know that "close" is also incorrect? The sign should read "Closed on Fridays" to tell customers that the shop is not open on

that day of the week. The omission probably occurred as we tend not to pronounce the last "d" sound in words that end with "-d" or "-ed".

"Close" is an interesting word in that it has a range of meanings apart from being the opposite of "open".

Being close to someone physically or emotionally is different from having a close haircut or being in a close contest. So this is one word we need to be extra careful in using.

In fact, you may recall a certain convenience store which cleverly plays on the different meanings for its tagline - "Always close but never closed". It just shows how much fun you can have with language when you master it!



### Mixing 'l' and 'r'

IN THE sign above, the word intended is "shuttle" bus, but the confusion probably arose because some Singaporean speakers tend to pronounce their "l"s like "r"s. So a word like "shuttle" ends up sounding like "shutter". A "shutter" either refers to a covering, usually louvred, for doors or windows, or the opaque shield in a camera.

### No need for 'meh'

"HIS son got study overseas meh?"  
In Singaporean English, we tend to

construct questions the same way we make statements. In Standard English, questions always begin with either a question word (such as "who" and "what") or a verb (such as "did" or "will").

So, in making a statement, we might say, "His son studied overseas." But if we are asking a question, it should be, "Did his son study overseas?"

"Meh" appears to be operating as a marker to flag the sentence as a question, but it is unnecessary since it should be the word order and structure that indicate whether a sentence is a question or a statement.

However, in conversation, it is possible to indicate a question by using a rising inflection in tone, such as saying "Your son studied overseas (rising tone)?"

"Got" is unnecessary in this case as well. In fact, it is often misused and overused in Singaporean speech.

### HOW TO SEND IN YOUR QUERIES

Please use the keyword

SMS/MMS: 75557

Email: 75557@stomp.com.sg



OUR LANGUAGE EXPERTS are (left to right): Mrs Joy Lee, Mrs Regina Davamani, Ms Connie Seng and Ms Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray. All four are master teachers in English language - experts who help teachers develop good teaching practices and programmes.