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Being misdirected

At first glance, the sign above looks like a clever play on the word "polyclinic" to suggest a wide range of cleaning services.

It did not take us long to figure out that "poly-clinic" has been misspelt, albeit in a creative way.

It is a stark reminder of how Singaporeans tend to spell words incorrectly as a result of inaccurate enunciation or carelessness. This is also reflected in another spelling error, "pedestrain", in the same sign, which should be spelt as "pedestrian".

Given that such signs are primarily intended for pedestrians, we propose that the sign would read better as:

"This way to bus stop and polyclinic."



Here is another sign spotted at an MRT station that would probably invite the giggles.

Intended as a sign to offer directions to commuters, the careless omission of the letter "e" from "here" would be a source of embarrassment for some because of its sexual connotations. It certainly would not be the meaning that our service provider would like to convey in a public place!

Almost and nearly

If you think that the following sentences sound odd, you are probably right.

- ▶ My dog is my best companion – he's nearly human.
- ▶ It's nearly incredible.
- ▶ I nearly thought you were right.

Although "nearly" has a similar meaning to "almost" and both can be used without much difference, this is usually applicable only when we are talking about progress in space or time, or things that can be measured or compared. Hence, each of the following pairs of sentences are correct:

- ▶ Yao Ming is nearly 2.3m in height. Yao Ming is almost 2.3m in height.
- ▶ The voyage is nearly over. The voyage is almost over.
- ▶ My results show that I'm nearly as clever as you. My results show that I'm almost as clever as you.

In the first set of sentences, the focus is not on progress towards an end or about things that are easy to measure. Dogs, for example, do not get more human. In cases like this, "almost", not "nearly", is used.

Incidentally, "almost" is usually used to mean something that is a little "nearer" than "nearly". So at 6.15pm, we might say, "It's nearly dinnertime", and at 6.25pm, "It's almost dinnertime".

"Nearly" is also not often used with "never", "nobody", "no one", "nothing", "nowhere" and "none". Instead, we use "almost" or "hardly" with words such as "anybody".

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

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