



Today
18/03/2010
Page: 42
Section: Letters
Region: Singapore Circulation: 584000
Type: Singapore - English Newspapers
Size: 188.00 sq.cms
Frequency: MTWTF

Good English begins at work

New institute would do well to craft English proficiency courses for local workforce

Letter from Rick Lim Say Kiong

IT IS heartening to know that an English Language Institute is finally being set up in Singapore, with the purpose of spearheading efforts to raise the standard of English here.

However, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen's statement that "the ability to write and speak the language well remains an essential skill to cultivate in the young" should extend to our current workforce to have a good grasp of the language.

I frequently encounter common errors in the office environment. How often have you seen these phrases in correspondence: "Please revert to me" or "Kindly reply to me"?

To "revert" means to regress or return to the original form, while the word "kindly" is generally used to describe compassion and benevolence.

Some expatriates have also commented that when locals converse with them in English, it is often riddled with errors and local slang. This perhaps shows up the inability of some Singaporeans to rid their "Singlish" habits when communicating

with native English speakers. We may boast that we are polyglots of an erudite nation, but we inadvertently allow one language to "corrupt" another.

Some may retort that as long as the message gets across, why do we need to be overly pedantic about it? Sure, we need not speak the Queen's English or write like Shakespeare, but the need to scribe and converse in proper Standard English is imperative to improving our current proficiency.

In our work environment, new employees often mimic their predecessors — be it in writing (letters or emails) or elocution (sales spiel). Thus, if grammatical errors are not corrected from the start, they get transmitted from one cohort of workers to the next, and even to their counterparts in other organisations.

In time to come, these mistakes become the norm, and no one's the wiser.

With these issues in mind, the English Language Institute should craft suitable courses for our local workforce — courses that focus on common mistakes in both written and spoken forms committed in the workplace — in addition to its aim to improve the English proficiency of our younger generations.