

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|----------------|------------|
| Headline | Singlish: Bad English but good for communication | | |
| Date | 20 th Sep 2009 | | |
| Media Title | The New Paper on Sunday | Section | <i>You</i> |
| Page No. | Pg 30 | Size | N.A. |
| Description | | | |

Singlish: Bad English but good for communication



HO LIAN-YI
MIDDLE CRASS
lianyi@sph.com.sg

That's truly uniquely S'pore

RECENTLY, I got a book in the post. It was titled *The Singapore Dating Guide Book: For the Sg New Independent Princess*.

On the back: "More essential than your PDA, the *Singapore Dating Guide Book (SDGB)* is the unconventional dating guide for the unconventional princess. Every SNIP deserves one. You do!"

Hold on a second.

This must be a mistake, I thought.

I've been mistaken for the wrong sex before, but a princess? I'm just not that kind of girl.*

It was from the author, who I don't know, but I could guess her personality type.

Clue 1: Her name is Dazzling Chong.

Clue 2: She wears a tiara in her huge author picture inside the back cover.

SNIP - that's her acronym for Singapore New Independent Princess.

Huh, I thought.

Good thing she wasn't a Singapore Hip Independent Teenager, eh.

So I flipped though it.

It was a treasure trove. Not for dating advice - I mean, it might be, it's just that things like the author's pulsating desire for Indian meat isn't relevant to a non-princess like me.

But it is a nice example of daily Singlish.

I love Singlish, it's the closest thing to something "Uniquely Singapore", and I don't just mean in the sense that it ignores standard grammar, like using adverbs with nouns.



For reasons I can't quite understand, the book is sprinkled with footnotes for translations for Malay and Hokkien words, as well as specific terms.

I mean, anyone who can understand a sentence like "Don't just stone there, you do-do bird!" is not going to need translations, while anyone who can't is going to be "blur like sotong" regardless.

But some of the footnotes were just brilliant.

Take NS: "National Service is where 18 year old boys become men in 2 years after learning how to clean their underwear, rifle and communal toilet."

I always feel pretty manly after giving my own rifle a good rub, I can tell you that.

I also loved the one for SPG: "Sarong Party Girl is a colloquial term for women who wears wraparound skirts and wraps herself around ang moh men."

Speaking to your audience

Obviously, she wanted to speak like her audience, rather than like how 60-year-old men who got beaten for splitting infinitives in grammar school think how people should speak.

Only in Singapore could this work as a joke: Alienation (not "Ah-Lian-nation").

It is quite obvious that the use of Singlish is not merely bad English, but used, indeed, as a way to communicate better.

In fact, I think she communicated too well because after flipping through the book, it strengthened my longstanding impression that Singaporean women are all slightly deranged.

Maybe they're just crazy for love.

** Note: I'm not a girl.*