

Headline	Let students have a taste of good Standard Singapore English		
Date	28 th Sep 2009		
Media Title	The Straits Times	Section	Forum
Page No.	Pg A21	Size	N.A.
Description	The writer suggests bringing back educational TV programmes that display good Standard Singapore English (SSE). She also noted that we should tap the pool of local talent, which includes politicians that speak good Standard Singapore English.		

Let students have a taste of good Standard Singapore English

I FULLY agree with Ms Pek Siok Lian's view of a "half-baked Mandarin and half-baked English" situation in Singapore ("My bigini is BOOMZ", Sept 13). We only have to open our ears in food centres, shopping malls and school canteens, and we get a constant aural assault of sub-standard Standard Singapore English (SSE) and Standard Singapore Mandarin.

Most of us are competent in neither English nor Mandarin. We have become a nation of half buckets, as the Mandarin saying goes.

As one of Ms Pek's former teachers in primary school, I can attest to the genuineness of her crisp diction.

Although she may have forgotten me, I remember wondering: "How on earth does an 11- or 12-year-old learn to speak consistently like that?" Ms Pek revealed that it was learnt unconsciously, by reading and having a real interest in the language for the love of it, not for economic gain.

Before the onslaught of tech toys and mobile communication tools, we had only the good old radio and black-and-white TV. Life was so much simpler then.

Communication meant we really engaged in conversation and story-telling. We picked up the phone and spoke to real people at the other end. Now we TET - text, e-mail and Twitter. Perhaps we

should start a "No TET Day" or "No TET Hour". Switch off the TV too and just talk to one another.

We used to listen to the BBC and local radio stations that had role models of good SSE speakers. Compare them with the present lot of TV personalities and one can see what sets them apart: garbled vowels and smothered initial and final consonants.

Put good role models on TV. We are not short of local talent, but watching Mark Lee and Patricia Mok in English sitcoms makes me switch to Channel 8. But the Mandarin half buckets elevate Guo Liang and Quan Yifeng to demi-god status.

Bring back educational TV pro-

grammes, but in a fun way. We need to strike a balance between the spoken and written form of any language. We cannot sacrifice one for the other.

Not all native speakers are good role models. So let's not rush to import foreign talent just yet. Let's tap the pool of local talent first. We can start with our politicians. Examples of speakers of good spoken SSE include Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs Ho Peng Kee: nothing ostentatious, just good spoken SSE that makes you feel comfortable.

Ellen Toh (Ms)