

Headline	Teachers can't do it alone		
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Description	The writer points out that the teachers in Singapore should not be totally blamed for the low level of spoken English here. She also states that Singaporeans have to make a concerted effort to stop speaking Singlish in order to improve their spoken English.		

IMPROVING SPOKEN ENGLISH

Teachers can't do it alone

IT AMAZES me how the recent discussion surrounding the standard of spoken English in Singapore has been blown out of proportion.

Instead of simply containing the controversy to the poor representation of Miss Ris Low as a Miss Singapore World, people are now bemoaning the future of spoken English in Singapore and wagging angry fingers at bemused teachers.

Why are Singaporeans reacting this way?

Singaporeans have proudly proclaimed for years that Singlish is a representation of national culture. Newspaper articles have argued in favour of this, and my Sin-

gaporean schoolmates tell me the same thing.

If it is perfectly acceptable to use Singlish as a means of communication, why are people shocked at the consequent inferior levels of spoken English?

Do they expect Singaporeans to effortlessly switch between "spoken English" and "Singlish", as if these are two disparate languages? Singlish is the spoken English of Singaporeans.

Moreover, it is ludicrous to argue that the reason for the low level of spoken English boils down to teachers who cannot communicate well. Teachers are Singaporeans too, so why should they be ex-

pected to talk differently from the rest of the population?

Yes, teachers should set good examples to students, but then so should parents, sports coaches, the hawkker who sells prawn noodles in the school canteen, and whoever else the student comes into contact with.

If education must be blamed, condemn the system's neglect of presentation skills, not the teachers. If students had been taught from an early age the need to speak well to convey a message, it would definitely have mitigated the problem we see today.

However, that alone will not raise the

standard of spoken English. Singaporeans need to look at the individual.

Singaporeans (particularly the young) have been brought up in a predominantly English-speaking environment. It is therefore their responsibility to start speaking as if they have been exposed to such privileges. All they need to do is make a concerted effort to stop speaking Singlish. There is no other remedy.

It is an idealistic proposal, but if Singaporeans wish to make a big fuss over something that has been apparent all along, they must recognise the need to stop blaming everyone but themselves.

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