

Headline	Don't play the blame game		
Date	12 Nov 2009		
Media Title	The Straits Times	Section	<i>Forum</i>
Page No.	Pg A37	Size	N.A.

ENGLISH STANDARDS

Don't play the blame game

I REFER to last Saturday's report, "Have English standards really fallen?"

Learning a language is not difficult. In its most practical and pragmatic form, learning by rote, or memorising a collection of phrases and sentences, is the quickest and most effective way to better speech and writing.

However, mastering a language, to use it creatively and understand its nuances, is a lifelong endeavour.

There is no global standard for good English. Something as simple as signing off a letter with "yours sincerely" or "sin-

cerely yours" depends on which side of the Atlantic one comes from or is familiar with. The use of the phrase "your good self" in a formal letter was previously seen as a sign of respect and courtesy, but one who uses it now would seem old-fashioned and subservient. Dictionaries are also being constantly updated, with new words added and outdated ones removed.

The pervasiveness of SMS has been blamed for deteriorating English standards, especially spelling. However, with the common use of word processors with spell-checks, spelling has become

less of a hindrance to good English. In fact, SMS can probably be credited with reducing verbosity of the written word.

Lamenting the state of English standards will not make it better. Blaming schools, teachers and the media is also mildly absurd as it is also via these avenues that good English is learnt.

Improving one's English involves reading, writing, listening and speaking. It also involves being aware of what good English is, as opposed to what is bad, and this comes only through encounters with both.

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