

<b>Headline</b>	Shun Singlish or lose out on global stage		
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# Shun Singlish or lose out on global stage

I REFER to Tuesday's letter by Ms Jessica Walker, "Teachers can't do it alone".

Ms Walker asserts that teachers cannot be blamed for the prevalent use of Singlish among students, but rather the system and the individuals themselves are at fault. Yet she fails to note that without teachers making a conscious effort to re-educate students, it is unlikely that students will do so on their own.

Singlish is far from a perfectly acceptable means of communication.

Perhaps when conversing with the hawker centre "uncle", Singlish may be preferred over proper English to evoke a sense of familiarity. But just as you do

not speak Cantonese during a job interview, Singlish is not acceptable in any formal situation.

Ms Walker states that "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 expected to talk differently from the rest of the population?"

Why should cooks be expected to cook more delicious food than the rest of us? Why should bowler Remy Ong be expected to hit higher pin falls than you and me? For most children, teachers are their first contact with "correct" English.

What should an education provide, if not proper communication skills with the world?

Singlish is one derivative that cannot be considered international. Just as teachers do not speak in Hokkien or Cantonese, they should not speak Singlish in most circumstances.

The hawker who sells prawn noodles and sports coaches have fewer obligations to speak proper English. Teachers, however, are expected to educate our children. Their primary obligation is to teach them to understand and be understood.

Singapore cannot survive as an autarchy. Language is now necessary at all strata of development. No longer are written letters the main form of communication - direct contact vis-a-vis the other party is increasingly predominant.

If we continue to adopt Singlish as our spoken language - or fail to "effortlessly switch", as Ms Walker puts it, between the two forms of English - we will definitely lose out on the global stage.

This transcends the role of Singlish in our national culture.

Without the ability to converse fluently in proper English, especially on an international platform, we will not survive. We need to make ourselves understood, not just heard.

**Zhou Penghui**