

Headline	Signs of bad English		
Date	12 Oct 2009		
Media Title	The Straits Times	Section	Home
Page No.	Pg B04	Size	N.A.
Description	Signs of bad English found in various parts of Singapore. (Part 1 of 4)		

This is the first of a four-part series on the Speak Good English Movement. **Yen Feng** took a look at signs in places of worship and found these examples of bad English. In the following weeks, we will look at similar examples in places including schools and tourist spots.

Signs of bad English

AT THE Buddha Tooth Relic Temple in South Bridge Road, American tourist Laura Usisken pointed to a poster and chuckled.

"It's hilarious," the 26-year-old told her travelling companions.

Her amusement was centred solely on the contents of the poster, which was meant to explain to visitors what a "drum tower" was used for.

It read: "The drum is pound both in

the morning and evening for the purpose of Sangha gathering."

The temple's poster is an example of bad English displayed around Singapore's religious institutions.

A check by The Straits Times last month at 15 places of worship – temples, mosques and churches – found that many had at least one sign or poster that had an error.

Some were typographical or spelling

mistakes, such as this one at St Andrew's Cathedral: "Viewers can view exhibits...at out new Welcome Centre", but many were grammatical errors.

A sign outside the Hindu Sri Mariamman Temple downtown, for example, warned devotees: "No footwear beyond this point." Another, at Masjid Jamee in Mosque Street, read: "All these robes are for visitor's use only."

Devotees told The Straits Times that

the poorly written signs did not bother them.

Mr Halim Hafiz, 51, said: "As long as I understand what the sign says, it's okay."

Mr Poh Chok Leng, a visitor at Buddhist temple Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, said he did not realise that a sign there was ungrammatical. It read: "Naked flame is strictly prohibited."

A few, however, wondered if it may leave visitors with a bad impression of the nation's standard of English as many places of worship are popular tourist attractions.

Ms Usisken, for one, did not think so: "These mistakes happen everywhere. I mean, it's not intentional. Just be more careful next time."

Language lecturer critiques the signs

DRUM TOWER

The second floor housed the Temple Drum. The drum is pound both in the morning and evening for the purpose of Sangha gathering.

It is also use for ceremonies chanting, not only for the congregation of all sentient beings but also to solemnize Buddhist rituals. It also served as a "command".

"This sentence shows several instances of the wrong tense, primarily because it was translated from a language (like Chinese) with no inflection or link between each other. The verb 'housed' should have been 'houses' since it follows a singular noun and is in the present tense. The verb 'pound' should have been 'pounded' for the correct grammatical flow. A similar mistake occurs in 'use' which should have been 'used'. Since 'ceremonies' is used as an adjective, to qualify the mode of chanting, it should have been 'ceremonial'. Lastly, 'served' should also have been in the eternal present as 'serves' and 'command' are better interpreted as 'call to prayer'."



"Once again, a direct transliteration from a language whose nouns and verbs are not 'inflected' or modified for tense or number. It should have been 'shoes' in the plural since no one wears merely one of a pair, and 'entering' the hall in present participle."

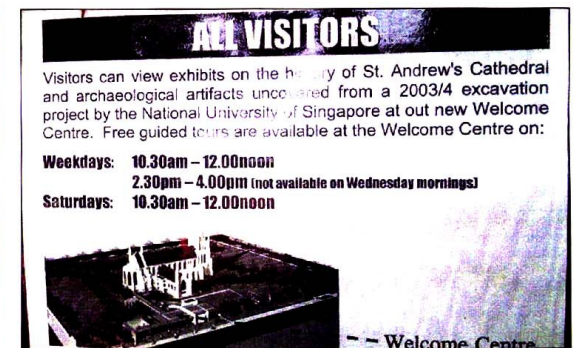
"(The bottom part) suggests that one has the choice of switching our cell-phones to silent mode or simply disengaging one's attention. All it needs is an insertion of the pronoun 'it' between 'switch' and 'off' and one would understand that the subject is still the cell-phone."



"The word 'appropriate' is spelt wrongly in the first instance, and is vague. What constitutes 'appropriateness'? Perhaps 'decorous' is a more suitable term. Simply delete the term 'tourist attention' and add 'attention to all visitors' as you cannot imply that the sign is directed exclusively at tourists."



"Since meat is a kind of food, the phrase sounds tautological. One imagines that vegetarianism is practised in this temple, so it is better to rephrase it as 'please do not bring any meat into the temple.'"



"This is a variation of that classic syntactical faux pas: 'The lady in the dress with the nose walked in.' All it requires is punctuation, in this case, a comma after 'dress' and 'nose', to make the sentence clearer. This sentence misleads readers

into thinking that the Welcome Centre was the site of the excavation project when it is actually the site of the exhibits. Insert a comma after NUS, and change the carelessly misspelt 'our' and the meaning emerges more clearly."



"Those who put up this sign forget that in English, the term footwear is generic, collective and plural. They envisage the hordes visiting their temple and over-compensated for what they imagine to be a lot of shoes."

Dr K.K. Seet is a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. He has served as a chairman and judge on several English language literary committees, and is the author of 10 books.