

<b>Headline</b>	Forget Singlish, polish your English		
<b>Date</b>	14 Dec 2009		
<b>Media Title</b>	Straits Times	<b>Section</b>	<i>Home: The New Market</i>
<b>Page No.</b>	Pg B06	<b>Size</b>	N.A.
<b>Description</b>	Good grammar and pronunciation are taught in various courses to help Singaporeans speak English properly.		

# Forget Singlish, polish your English

Good grammar and pronunciation are taught in various courses to help Singaporeans speak English properly

BY ZACKARIA ABDUL RAHIM

A PUBLIC discussion on speaking good English has left engineer Michael Lim wondering about his own grasp of the language.

"As with other Singaporeans who have gone through the O and A levels to get into university, I think my English standard is reasonably good," says Mr Lim, 35, who graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS). "But there were times when I felt unsure about the correct grammar or pronunciation of unfamiliar words especially."

Mr Lim is not alone. According to the British Council, it has received calls regularly from people who want to know more about the correct use of English.

Ms Lee Hewson, centre manager of British Council Tampines Centre, says: "At the British Council, we offer different kinds of language programmes — courses for foreigners who need to learn how to speak English, and courses for Singaporeans who have a range of different needs, such as developing accuracy in speaking, and understanding the accepted norms of business writing."

"Singaporeans also come to attend our more challenging courses such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and other exam preparation programmes for adults, and proficiency courses for secondary students."

Speaking good English is a perennial topic in public discussions in the media, where examples of bad English — spoken and written — are highlighted.

Recently, Singapore Press Holdings' Stomp portal ran a Fix That Sign contest, where the public submitted photos of signages that were worded poorly and suggested the right ways to improve them. It received a total of 365 entries, from which 10 were short-listed for public voting to pick the win-



PHOTOS: BRITISH COUNCIL

ners. The winners will be announced on Dec 18.

The contest was held in partnership with the Speak Good English Movement, a nationwide movement launched in 2000 to encourage Singaporeans to speak Standard English.

Although Singlish has often been blamed for ungrammatical English, Ms Hewson thinks otherwise.

"Singaporeans speak Singlish and they speak English," she says.

"There can be some pronunciation differences that impede communication, for example, different intonation patterns that have been influenced by

languages students are using more commonly at home. This is a problem for any language learner."

She adds that pronunciation is one of the hardest areas to develop "as you need to hear what you are saying incorrectly and know how to correct it, and this can be a slow process".

So, while Singaporeans are comfortable with English, with many considering it as their first language, they can also take up courses to improve their pronunciation and speak properly.

At NUS Extension, its Phonetics for Better Pronunciation course, which runs for 30 hours and costs \$480, is aimed at those who wish to improve their spoken English. The participants are expected to have a level of language competence to cope with the teaching and instruction in the programme.

The Centre for Continuing Education at Nanyang Technological University runs a course called A Guide to Good Pronunciation, in which participants learn about rules of pronun-

tion, intonation patterns and rhythm of natural speech.

At the British Council, its Business English Skills courses "are one of our latest and most successful developments", says Ms Hewson. They consist of two strands: a course on speaking and pronunciation, and a course on writing and grammar. Both courses run for three months.

On solely listening to the BBC to improve one's diction, Ms Hewson disagrees, saying it "is a purely receptive activity".

"Listening to American movies does not make us sound more American," says Ms Hewson.

"To work on speaking skills requires repetition, drilling, correction and developing an understanding of what you really need to work at."

