

Headline	Spot anything wrong in this notice?		
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Description	Fix-That-Sign contest draws 400 entries and thousands of votes from the public.		

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Online portal Stomp's contest on badly worded signs draws 400 entries and thousands of votes

By LEOW SI WAN

READERS responded when Stomp asked them to send pictures of badly worded signs posted in public places – in three months, the online news site received close to 400 grammatically incorrect examples accompanied by suggestions to reword them.

The most common error spotted: “No outside food allowed.”

There were at least 10 entries submitted of that error, or its variations, to Stomp's inaugural Fix That Sign contest, said the Web portal's editor Chew V Ming.

One example spotted at a coffee shop: “All outside food and drinks are not allowed in this permise.”

Language experts who did not want to be named said that while the term “outside food” is understood by Singaporeans, it is ambiguous and confuses native speakers of the language.

A suggestion, said one expert, would be: “Only food sold here is allowed to be eaten on the premises.”

After the contest closed in October, Stomp shortlisted 10 entries as contenders for the worst, or most glaringly wrong, signs.

Said Mr Chew: “There were many with minor errors, but we picked 10 with serious syntax errors.”

Voting concluded on Sunday, with more than 9,000 people taking part.

The most popular, with 3,600 votes, was a sign from a coffee shop in Tampines which said: “After midnight self-service.”



This photo of an ungrammatical sign was one of the 400 entries to Stomp's Fix That Sign contest promoting good English. PHOTO: STOMP

The correct version should be “Self-service after midnight”.

Coming in second with close to 2,000 votes was a sign which read “No pet are allowed”, instead of the correct “No pets are allowed”. In third place was a sign at a coffee shop indicating that “there are more sitting at the rear” when it should have been “seats”.

Voters chose the simpler signs over garbled howlers such as “Sorry is not allow washing hand here”, which garnered about 200 votes.

There are many reasons for the errors. Said Ms Teo Hee Lian, an associate trainer in civil service writing: “They may be direct translations from another lan-

guage, carelessness, replacing a word with another that seems nicer but cannot be used in the same way.”

Many bad signs were found at food outlets, but they were also spotted in public toilets, hospitals and shopping malls, said Mr Chew.

In classic Singlish, a banner in Upper Serangoon Road read: “No warehouse die all must go.”

Other errors had the word “food” becoming “foods”, “chilled beef knuckles” turning into “chill beef knuckles”, and “wheel-clamped” misspelt as “wheel-cramped”.

Sometimes, the suggested corrections were also wrong.

Someone who submitted an entry of a sign warning people of a “Sloppy Road” suggested it be replaced with “slopey” instead of the correct “Slope Ahead”.

Indeed, there are plenty of errors if you are observant, said Mr Pham Tan Hung, a permanent resident from Vietnam who sent in five entries.

Said the 24-year-old engineer: “I didn't notice the bad grammar on signs until I found out about the contest. Once I started looking out for mistakes, I could easily spot them.”

Though the signs were hilarious, the contest had a serious objective, said Mr Goh Eck Kheng, chairman of the Speak Good English Movement.

5 worst signs

Entries voted as the worst of the lot:

■ **Original:** After midnight self-service
Corrected: Self-service after midnight

■ **Original:** No pet are allow
Corrected: No pets are allowed

■ **Original:** There are more sitting at the rear
Corrected: There are more seats at the rear (or “at the back”)

■ **Original:** Wheelchair are not allowed to use the travelator
Corrected: Wheelchairs are not allowed on the travelator

■ **Original:** Q Bread encourage us to buy more spent less. All breads are selling at \$1 each.
Corrected: Q Bread encourages its customers to buy more, yet spend less. All items are priced at \$1.

“We want to create an environment where people are surrounded by good English,” he said. “We hope that Singaporeans will not only be aware of the standard of English they use on signs, but also of the standard of English they speak.”

Mr Chew added that the contest's success showed many Singaporeans were aware of how English should be used in everyday situations.

The final verdict on the worst sign – based on votes and the decisions of the Speak Good English Movement – will be announced on Friday. Contestants who submitted entries stand to win tech goodies – among them a netbook, a mobile phone and a camera.

siwan@sph.com.sg