

Headline:	Singlish or English, how we speak matters		
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Description:	Goh Eck kheng, chairman, Speak good English Movement, says that by this year 80 schools will implement the whole school approach to learning English and the English language Institute of Singapore has started work to improve the communicative effectiveness of English medium teachers. over the yeas , more and more Singaporeans are speaking a form of English, but the general level of grammatical English has fallen.		

Singlish or English, how we speak matters

Thanks, Colin Goh, for writing the article in Life-Style (Speak Better Through Love, Sept 18), about what influences his baby's language learning.

I knew in my heart that with Yakuza Baby at the age when she is learning to speak, Goh would have a new perspective on language issues in Singapore.

Yakuza Baby is fortunate that both Goh and his wife are fluent in English and Singlish and know when it is appropriate to use each form.

However, the reality is that not all families in Singapore have language skills such as his. I eavesdrop a fair bit these days, and know that the work of the Speak Good English Movement is far from over.

At the recent Good English Carnival held at the Jurong Regional Library, I heard a father tell his young son, "Wait, daddy wants to watch the books."

Fortunately for the boy, he learns English in school. By this year, 80 schools will implement the whole school approach to learning English and the English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS) has started work to improve the communicative effectiveness of English-medium teachers. I believe that schools and pre-schools form a frontline.

Goh's friends in New York City who have learnt

to speak English when their parents did not are in the same position as English-speaking Singaporeans of two generations ago.

Children then learnt the language in school and spoke their mother tongue at home because their parents could not speak English.

Adults who wanted to learn the language modelled their English after that spoken by the British residents and others who spoke the language well. (Here, I hasten to add that the Speak Good English Movement is not promoting Queen's English but Standard English that is understood around the English-speaking world.)

So, I agree with Goh that the home environment is not the only factor that shapes a child's speech. School and society are also important.

Over the years, more and more Singaporeans are speaking a form of English, but the general level of grammatical English has fallen. Now, many school children probably return home to an environment where English is spoken poorly. Now, we hear more broken English or Singlish spoken on the streets than before. Some, I suspect, even think that Singlish is Standard English.

By the way, the past campaigns of the Speak Good English Movement have never involved rabid anti-Singlish rhetoric. The review by the Ministry of Education on how English is taught and the work of ELIS will make a difference in time. For those who have left school, help comes from those who can speak English well. If we create an environment where good English is spoken and heard, Singaporeans poor in English will also be able to acquire the ability to speak English properly, if not well.

"Apa macam?" (Malay for "so how?"), Goh asked. I believe that whether the answer is "Macam itu boleh juga" (Things are good here, too) or "Macam itu tak baik" (Things are not good) depends on those who can influence others to speak English well.

How we speak makes a difference.

Goh Eck Kheng
chairman
Speak Good English Movement

write in

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