



Annex A

4th May 2005

FACT SHEET

INTRODUCING THE “GOOD ENGLISH !CONS” & THEIR LEARNING JOURNEYS

The Speak Good English Movement encourages Singaporeans to speak good (i.e. grammatical) English so as to be able to communicate more effectively. This year, for the first time, the Movement will be introducing "Good English !cons" to show Singaporeans that it is not difficult to speak good English.

The Movement has identified a group of Singaporeans, ranging from talented performing artistes to ordinary Singaporean workers, parents and students, to be its “Good English !cons”. Like most Singaporeans, they use English in the course of their work. They want to, and do speak standard English in order to be understood. Speaking good English is part of their image. By their example the Movement hopes to show that if the “Good English !cons” can speak good English, so can everyone else! The “Good English !cons” are:

Mohd Hata Rahmad, 38 years old.
President, Hip-Hop Club and the “Father” of Break-Dancing in Singapore
Assistant Engineer, Singapore Technologies

“I was a very playful boy when I was in primary school. I was more interested in play rather than reading or learning English. But things changed when Mrs Ee, my English teacher in Primary 2 and 3 at Alexandra Hill Primary School, came along. Mrs Ee loved to tell stories which I enjoyed listening to. I was able to relate to her. She encouraged and motivated me to pick up reading. It was Mrs Ee more than anyone else, who taught me to speak good English.

As a father, I speak and read to my 12-year old daughter as much as I can. In my free time, I take her to the Bukit Batok Community Library at West Mall to borrow books. I will certainly do the same for my second daughter who’s on the way!

English is very important as it is a universal language. As an Assistant Engineer, I need a good command of English to communicate effectively with my colleagues and overseas’ clients.”

Paramajothi Prasad, 21 years old.
Full-time Gamer/Cyber-Athlete - Captain of Team TiTans

"My interest in English is due mainly to the influence of my dad and sisters. They love to read. One day, one of my sisters left her collection of ‘Bookworm Club’s Short Stories’ lying around in the house. I picked one up and was hooked on to English and to reading ever since. I even joined the ‘Bookworm Club’!

Contrary to what others think, there's a place for good English even in gaming circles. Speaking good English helps gamers and cyber-athletes like me a lot. For one, we're able to communicate what gaming is all about to a wider audience. Two, as a professional gamer good English comes in handy when we're out seeking sponsors! Thirdly, English is the main language at international gaming competitions."

Triple Noize Rappers - "Shahfii" (Shahfii Bin Mohamed Ali, 26 years old) and "Rama" (Ramachandran S/O Srigadan, 27 years old).

Shahfii: "My mother was the one who set me off on my English learning journey! She was my great motivator. My mother always encouraged me to use simple English when speaking and writing when I was young. My first storybook (Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory) was from my mother. As English is the universal language for business, communication and socialising, I make it a point to keep up with my English. These days, I rely mainly on Reader's Digest to polish up my English!"

Rama: "I started learning English through reading. I can still remember the first English book that I read in primary school - 'Motty and the Satayman'. What an interesting book! From then on, I always wanted to read more English books to help me improve my English. When I was with East View Secondary School, my English teacher, Mrs Ravi, was definitely the No 1 influence when it came to English. I was impressed with her good English and wanted to speak proper English like her!"

English is equally important in my work as a songwriter and rapper. I have to be able to pronounce words correctly. Since my family speaks English, this helps me a lot.”

**Ms Kim Wakerman, 15 years old.
Student; TV Actress, Kids’ Central**

“When I was 4-years old, my parents enrolled me in a speech and drama class. There, I started learning about verbs, adjectives and the rest of English grammar and the different ways to speak well. When I was in Primary 1 and 2, whilst at CHIJ Katong Convent, drama classes were compulsory. I enjoyed the classes very much and speech and drama became my interest. I find that it a very interesting and effective way to pick up good English. I now have a whole collection of Enid Blyton’s books at home! All these helped me start off on my English learning journey.

Presently, my English teacher makes it compulsory for my classmates and I to visit the school’s library once a week during English lessons. We have to note new words that we’ve learnt. All this helps further improve my English and brings in good grades in my exams.

As a TV host and actress with Kids Central, being comfortable with English makes me more confident when hosting or acting. I feel that English is really important to Singaporeans as we are a multi-racial society. We must be able to communicate effectively with one another.”

Ms Lynn Wakerman, 9 years old.
Student , Primary 3, CHIJ Katong Convent.

"I'm lucky to have an elder sister whom I can speak to and play with. More importantly, I can turn to her when I need help with English! As we live close to the Marine Parade Community Library, my sister and I visit the library often to borrow books that we then read together. Speech and drama is compulsory at school. I enjoy the classes and have lots of fun picking up new ways to speak and pronounce words. All this helps my English a lot!

Speaking and writing good English is very important to me in another way. I often write to my pen pal, cousins and relatives who live overseas. Only if I'm able to write well, will they be able to understand me."

Azhagiya Pandiyan, 40 years old.
Assistant General Manager, Indian Programming, MediaCorp Radio - Oli 96.8FM and Author

"I was first exposed to English when I was in Primary Four, when I returned to Singapore from India. At that time, I had no background in English at all as I studied Tamil while I was studying in India. I lived in India when I was young. My family did not speak English at all!

Having to learn English was a huge hurdle for me. Fortunately, my English teachers were able to motivate me and had lots of patience with me. In no time at all, I picked up the language. I am grateful to my teachers at Cantonment Primary School for showing me the way to good English.

English is important because it is a global language and Singapore has gone global. I am all for the Speak Good English Movement's efforts to get more Singaporeans to speak good English in order to be better understood."

Ms Sharon Ismail, 30 years old.

TV Presenter (Suria), Actress

"My parents were the greatest influence on my English." They spoke and read to me from the time I was a toddler. My bedtime ritual every night - I laid all my books on my bed and picked one for my dad to read aloud to me. Next came my Primary 1 and 2 English teacher, Mrs Allen Ooi, from Kong Hwa School. She gave me my first 'grown up' book, Enid Blyton's 'Mr Pink Whistle's Party'.

As a child, I lived with my grandparents who spoke to me in Malay, so I was exposed to two languages at the same time. When school started, I was in a Mandarin-speaking environment (it was a Chinese school), so as a child who didn't know any better – I just learnt the language and coped! This is my approach to speaking English. I need it for my work, for communicating with friends from other cultures. Most of all, I love the English language for its nuances. Every word reveals layers of emotions, so just speak!"

Suhaimi Yusof, 30s.

Actor, Malay TV Presenter and Event Emcee

"When I was in Secondary 3, I did an impersonation of Michael Jackson as part of a class assignment. I had to write the entire script for this impersonation. Although my English was average then, I still managed to bag the first prize. I then realised how important English

was. While at Tampines Junior College, my General Paper teacher left a big impression on me as her English was good and she was also a performer (on the RaRa Show). As I could relate to her, I picked up good English tips from her, too.

I realised the importance of English in my work when I became a radio deejay. I had to do a lot of research for my shows which led me to pick up the reading habit. On the airwaves, I have to speak to listeners and English comes in handy.

English is definitely a very valuable language tool in our daily lives. As a father of three, I'm able to encourage my children to read and speak good English because I love the language. How do I get my children to read and speak good English? Buy each of them three books a month and read with them. I now have a mini library at home!"

**Mdm Theresa Sim, in her 40s.
Taxi Driver**

"I come from a Chinese-speaking environment. I was lucky my parents sent me to an English school when I started schooling in the 1960s. Even then, I had to struggle to cope with English. Today, in my job as a taxi-driver, it's very important for me to be able to speak good English as most passengers, especially tourists, speak English. Being able to speak good English helps as taxi drivers are 'ambassadors' of Singapore since we're often the first Singaporeans that a foreigner meets."

Ms Bukoh Mary, 31 years old.
Deejay, Y.E.S 93.3

"My brother, Laurence, was the only one in our Chinese-speaking family who was fluent in English. He helped me muster English when I was in primary school. Laurence impressed upon me the importance of understanding and speaking good English. I soon picked up the reading habit. I started with simple English storybooks - Cinderella, Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs, and a whole collection of Enid Blyton. Laurence also taught me how to use a dictionary. That's how I learnt many new words!

The next person to help me along in English was my English teacher at Raffles Girls' School, Mrs Seah. She was extremely strict and loved to spring spelling tests on us. Initially, I failed many of these tests as I was unfamiliar with difficult words. But this spurred me to read more and to look up the dictionary more often. Eventually, my English improved.

Although I'm a deejay with a Chinese radio station, it's important for me to speak English well. Most people don't realise that even Chinese radio station needs to interview people who don't speak Chinese. This is where English comes in handy."

Ms Wong Lee Jeng
In her early 30s
Deejay, Capital Radio 95.8

"I studied in the Seh Chuan High School, a Chinese school, in the 1970s. Then, an education policy change resulted in English becoming the first language. To help the students cope with this change, my school engaged English teachers and started a special English class. There, we were introduced to the great works of English Literature such as H G Wells and Shakespeare. It was here that I began to develop a strong interest in wanting to learn English and a love for English literature. At 17, I published my first book - a translation of a book of short stories by H G Wells into Chinese!

I've found out that being a bilingual deejay in a Chinese radio station, can sometimes open doors to exciting opportunities. For example, when I interviewed Kiitaro, the New Age musician from Japan when he visited Singapore in the early-90s, I had to conduct the interview in English as he did not speak Chinese.

It took time and effort for me to learn to speak English. But I'm happy and proud that I've crossed this hurdle in life!"