

July 19, 2006

Wrong: Can fit or not ? Right: Is that the correct size?

Speak Good English Movement targets service sector workers

By Maria Almenoar

THE push for Singaporeans to speak good English is moving to store fronts this year.

As part of the annual Speak Good English Movement, sales assistants will receive pamphlets on commonly misused phrases in stores.

They will be encouraged to drop Singlish expressions like 'can fit or not?' and 'no more this colour' and use proper English: 'Is that the correct size?' and 'I'm sorry we no longer have it in that colour'.

The Singapore Retailers Association (SRA), which has more than 300 members, is one of the six new organisations taking part in this year's movement.

Said SRA's executive director, Ms Lau Chuen Wei: 'There have been complaints that our service standards are dropping and sales assistants are rude.

'On many occasions, they don't even realise that the Singlish phrases they use may sound rude and abrupt.'

She added that improving the standard of English of service industry workers was crucial, especially with 16,000 visitors arriving for the the International Monetary Foundation-World Bank meetings in September.

The Speak Good English Movement, now in its sixth year, will work on encouraging Singaporeans to speak standard English so that they will be understood not only locally but globally.

Said the chairman of the movement, Professor Koh Tai Ann: 'Speaking good English is also about jobs and improving our marketability. Singaporeans must realise that they cannot be content with being understood by just the people around them - we must be understood globally.'

The movement was first mooted by then-prime minister Goh Chok Tong in 1999 who said that Singlish would hurt Singapore's aim to be a First World economy.

Over the years, there has been an ongoing debate on whether there was a place for Singlish and if it was part of our national identity.

The hot topic now is whether we need to bring in 'native speakers' to teach our students.

'The perception is that English standards are slipping but there are no real studies to prove this,' said Prof Koh.

Singapore Polytechnic, the Education Ministry and National Institute of Education are looking into doing research on the standard of English in Singapore.

The Speak Good English campaign this year includes National Library Board forums for parents on how to read to their children and a British Council contest on Singapore's favourite English word. More information can be found at www.goodenglish.org.sg .

mariaa@sph.com.sg

Copyright © 2006 Singapore Press Holdings. All rights reserved. [Privacy Statement](#) & [Condition of Access](#)