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Time to get tough on problem of Singlish

AFTER reading the article, 'What if we're understood only in S'pore, Malaysia and Batam?' (The Sunday Times, Aug 6), I feel that Singaporeans should display a more resolute attitude towards the problem of Singlish.

Why are we still viewing the Singlish problem as a 'controversial' issue, as mentioned in the article? Why is there no plan yet to phase out the use of Singlish in the mass media in the long run?

In contrast, in the Speak Mandarin Campaign, the decisive ban on dialects came almost immediately after the campaign was started in the mid-1970s.

The contrast gives the impression that using Singlish is not as 'bad' as using dialect.

It is ironic that while we pursue excellence in all possible fields and domains, we are still quite tolerant and indifferent towards Singlish, even where some of the well-educated are concerned.

I know of a teacher who corrects her children's mistakes in spoken English on the spot, without fail. She displays a firm 'no-Singlish' attitude which she hopes her children will uphold. But she is an exception.

Some say Singlish gives Singaporeans a unique identity. I am not against this view, but why hold on to a sub-standard language as one of our trademarks? Why not upgrade this trademark into one that is more comprehensible and respectable?

It would take many years to change the attitude on Singlish. Barely 20 or 30 years ago, many smokers snubbed the idea that smoking caused lung cancer. Now people believe that even passive smoking is dangerous.

We should review our attitude as things have changed drastically over the years, in and out of Singapore. An in-depth study on the impact of the problem is imperative.

English is our first language and soon it will become the most-spoken language in homes. In fact, many children are already claiming English as their 'mother tongue'. We cannot afford to let our lingua franca be divided into two streams, with the sub-stream overwhelming the mainstream 30 to 50 years down the road.

The Government has taken the correct action to improve the teaching of English at the pre-primary and primary levels. On this first battlefield, we impart to our children a stronger foundation in English, so that they would not be influenced easily by bad or wrong use of English in later years.

But we need to fight head-on on the second front too: tackling the environmental problem caused by Singlish - in workplaces, homes, advertisements, cinemas and other entertainment channels.

Let us make a million 'No Singlish' tags and wear them on our chest every August when we celebrate our National Day.

Ng Ya Ken

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