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Singlish is part of our culture, an infusion of all things Singaporean

I REFER to the letter, 'Time to get tough on problem of Singlish' by Mr Ng Ya Ken (ST, Aug 10). In his letter, he fiercely criticises Singlish, calling it a 'problem' and a 'sub-standard language' and asking why there is no plan to 'to phase out the use of Singlish'. However, I disagree with Mr Ng, as I feel Singlish is not a problem in Singapore.

Singlish is a culture in Singapore, an infusion of all things Singaporean. Over the years, we have embarked on an endless search for what makes us Singaporean. People have come up with things like laksa, national service, HDB estates and so on. However, I feel what we are searching for is right under our noses, coming from our mouths - Singlish.

Singlish is uniquely Singaporean, something Singaporeans can call their own. It incorporates elements from the four national languages, forming a special Singaporean language that is common to all Singaporeans, regardless of race or religion. Singlish, in a way, is our national language.

If you have friends who have recently migrated to Singapore, and are settling here as Singapore citizens or permanent residents, it is when they start to speak Singlish that they truly become Singapore citizens. It is when they start to spout 'lahs' and 'lehs' that they are truly Singaporean. It is when they start to mix Chinese, English and Malay freely in their speech that they are truly one of us.

Nevertheless, one must understand that Singlish should be used in the correct time and place. Among family and friends, Singlish is the preferred mode of communication as we all understand each other. However, if the situation calls for proper English to be used, then Singlish should not be used. As long as we use Singlish when the situation befits it and English when English is needed, then Singlish is perfectly acceptable.

Singlish is a part of Singapore's heritage. Evolved from many years of mixing languages, it truly shows Singapore's development as a multicultural nation. Doing away with Singlish is like erasing a huge chunk of Singapore's history.

Neo Yue Zheng

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