



SPEECH BY MR GOH ECK KHENG, CHAIRMAN, SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH MOVEMENT, AT THE MEDIA BRIEFING FOR THE SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH MOVEMENT 2008, 19 AUGUST 2008, 9.30AM AT GARUDA PADANG CUISINE

Good morning.

Members of the media

Speak Good English Movement committee members and partners

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome everyone to the media briefing for this year's Speak Good English Movement.

Thanks to all.

1. When my friends heard that I had taken the chair of the Speak Good English Movement, a few of them asked me if I really thought the Movement could improve the standard of English in Singapore. I believe that the Speak Good English Movement Steering Committee and Secretariat cannot do it on our own, but with the multiplier effect created by the media, partners and sponsors like you – and Singaporeans who can speak good English - it is possible. In this way, the Speak Good English Movement will swell and gather momentum as a movement. So, to the media, our partners and sponsors, thank you for your active support.
2. Let me quickly state the objectives of the Movement. It aims to encourage Singaporeans to speak good English, that is, grammatically correct English; Standard English that is understood around the world.
3. When the Speak Good English Movement was launched in 2000, the focus was to raise awareness of the importance of speaking good English. What we want to do now is to **encourage people to change their attitude and take action to improve their English.**



4. To help focus our efforts, we have divided Singaporeans into three broad bands. The first comprises **Singaporeans who can speak Standard English, including those who choose to code-switch**. The second band, which forms our main target group, are **those who cannot yet speak Standard English and are open to improving themselves**. The last band is made up of **those who are not able to speak Standard English and do not see the importance of doing so**.

5. We invite all Singaporeans who speak English well to become activists of the Speak Good English Movement. They can do this by simply being good role models and speak good English to those who cannot speak the language well. I admit that I used to code-switch when I spoke to those whom I thought cannot speak good English. Then I realised that that's very condescending, equivalent to talking down to some one. How would you feel if a native speaker of English came up to you in Orchard Road and asked: "Where in Singapore can I looky-looky at nice-nice orchids... you know, flow-ers?" English is not only the common language of all Singaporeans; speaking it well shows our respect to each other.

6. English is also the language of international business and global communication. Even China, which has one-fifth of the earth's population, knows that it needs English to engage the world. It is therefore much more compelling that a tiny country like ours should help those among us who wish to improve their English. Likewise, we need to persuade those who do not see the importance of speaking Standard English to change their attitude and take action.

7. To achieve these goals, the Movement has planned and executed many initiatives with our partners, many of whom are present today.

ComfortDelGro and **SMRT** are sponsoring advertising media space on buses and in high-traffic MRT stations and trains to publicise the Movement's message.

MediaCorp Radio 938LIVE continues to broadcast the "English@Work" e-newsletter fortnightly.



STOMP is building on the very successful “English As It Is Broken” micro-site and, **STOMP** and **Panpac Education** will be launching the sequel to their bestselling book of the same name at the launch of this year’s Speak Good English Movement next Tuesday.

The staff and students of **Singapore Polytechnic’s School of Business** conducted a benchmark survey for the Movement in November last year to evaluate the effectiveness of the Movement, as well as to find out Singaporeans’ perceptions of the importance of speaking English well. The findings from this survey, which have helped us chart our future, will be announced by Minister Lim Boon Heng at the launch next week.

Next, the **Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA)** and **National Library Board** will host road shows in four public libraries to give Singaporeans the opportunity to ascertain their English language proficiency through **WDA’s** Employability Skills System.

Leading the way for retailers are **METRO** and **TANGS**, which will collaborate with **WDA** in its Workplace Literacy initiative to encourage frontline staff to communicate better through the use of Standard English.

Similarly, the **Singapore Retailers Association** will be launching “Service English for Retail Professionals”, a new training program targeted specifically at raising the level of spoken English among frontline retail staff.

Journey Pictures has teamed up with the Movement to further spread the Speak Good English message through the entertaining documentary, “Mad About English.”

The Straits Times and the Speak Good English Movement have co-organised the “Inspiring Teacher of English Award” with strong support by the **Ministry of Education**.

The **British Council** contributes web resources and will hold workshops for parents at various **NLB** libraries later this year to promote the Movement’s message.



The **YMCA** will hold its 22nd “Plain English Speaking Awards” for students to sharpen their speaking skills and to build confidence in public presentation.

The **Institute of Technical Education** supports the Movement with its very own ongoing Speak Good English Movement that encourages its students to speak up, speak out and speak well.

For all these activities, I thank partners and sponsors once again for helping us to broaden the reach of the Speak Good English Movement.

8. This year’s key message centres on the phrase “**I can.**” I can help others improve their English. I can take action to improve my English. I can speak good English if I want to.

9. I have noticed that people will make an effort to speak better English when I speak to them in good English. This tells me that speaking good English takes a conscious effort. I realise that we can speak good English all the time if we pay attention to our speech and, if our English is weak, we can improve our English if we put our minds to it.

10. As the policeman in the film, “Mad About English”, puts it: Don’t be shy, just try. Let’s all try, and in trying, the standard of English in Singapore will improve.

11. I am grateful that each of you – partners and the media – is helping us promote good English in Singapore. Thank you for joining the Movement.