



**SPEECH BY MR GOH ECK KHENG, CHAIRMAN OF THE SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH MOVEMENT  
AT THE ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE SYMPOSIUM ORGANISED BY THE SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH  
MOVEMENT, AT 2.30 PM ON SATURDAY 15 JULY 2017, AT THE ARTS HOUSE.**

Ladies and gentleman, thank you for coming to this symposium on English in Singapore.

The English language arrived on our shores 198 years ago when the English East India Company set up a trading station here. Raffles brought with him British administrators and the free port attracted English-speaking merchants. He founded the Singapore Institution (the school that now bears his name) in 1823 and the teaching of English was formally introduced. From then, mission schools for girls and boys were started: The Singapore Free School, St Margaret's School, St Joseph's Institution, Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, St Andrew's School, Victoria School.

The founding of my alma mater, the Anglo-Chinese School, in 1886 illustrates the status of the English language during that period. By that time, Singapore was booming. Keppel Harbour was already servicing ships owned by the Borneo Company, Collyer Quay had been built on reclaimed land, Boustead and Co was poised to plant rubber estates in Malaya, Tan Tock Seng, Whampoa and Tan Kim Seng, all of whom spoke English, had already made their mark on the port's business enterprise.

It was then that Straits Chinese businessmen who wished to improve their English met to debate in English at the Celestial Reading Association. Rev William Oldham, who chanced upon their meeting, was invited to speak, and was subsequently asked by the members to teach their sons English.

Keeping in mind that so many English-medium schools were already in existence, the founding of ACS shows that there was a constant, strong demand for learning English. The circumstances of its founding also shows that those who spoke English wanted to speak it better and took active steps to learn and improve.

The English language made it easier for Chinese, Malay and Indian merchants to do business with the British, European and American traders. It also gave people entry to the civil service and jobs in western trading firms.

At that time, the percentage of Asians who spoke English was small, but those who did strove to use proper grammar. Their teachers and models were native speakers. The environment of the English language in Singapore was strong.

English remains the language of business and administration in Singapore, and is also the language of education. Although a high percentage of Singaporeans speak and write in English, the standard is not as good as it used to be. Perhaps it is simply because we are less careful about how we use English. Perhaps it is because we no longer consciously model our English after those who use it well. We are at risk of losing our edge of having fluent English in the connected business world.

This symposium seeks to discuss issues related to the use and standard of English in our country. It also aims to explore how we can improve our English and how we might help others improve theirs.

Teaching and learning are vital to this. Thus, we recognise the importance of English-language teaching by the Movement's annual Inspiring Teacher of English Award. However, teaching does not only happen in school but should happen at home, among friends and in the workplace. Similarly, we can learn wherever we are – as long as we have the aim to improve.

Creating a good English language environment in Singapore is a collective goal. It is as much the Movement's role as it is the responsibility of every Singaporean. Those who are fluent in English must be role models to those who wish to improve. Those who are weak in spoken and written English should seek help and apply themselves.

We are very heartened to know that there are individuals and groups who are keen on helping others improve their standard of English. To encourage and empower them, the Speak Good English Movement is pleased to introduce a Funding Support Scheme for projects that raise awareness and encourage the use of Standard English in Singapore. We hope that these funds will help get plans and ideas off the ground, and inspire others to support the Movement. If you would like to start a project, do submit a proposal to us. Details can be found on our website at [goodenglish.org.sg](http://goodenglish.org.sg).

If you want to be a champion of the English language, if you are helping someone to be more fluent in English, email us at [nhb\\_speakgoodenglishmovement@nhb.gov.sg](mailto:nhb_speakgoodenglishmovement@nhb.gov.sg) to receive updates on resources. Write to us to share tips. Tell us your success stories to inspire and encourage others.

Let's create an environment of good English together and help each other improve our standard of spoken and written English in Singapore.

I hope that you will enjoy the discussions this afternoon.