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**From: The Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew**

**To: All Newspapers**

Let me explain the reasons for recruiting native English-speaking teachers.

2. I was taught English by Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Eurasian teachers from Primary One to Standard Five in Telok Kurau English School from 1928 to 1935, and in Raffles Institution from 1936 to 1937. For my last two years in Raffles Institution, I had native English teachers to teach me English: an Englishman in Junior Cambridge (1938), two, an Australian and a Scotsman, in Senior Cambridge (1939). For the four years I was in RI, the principal was a Scotsman. He addressed the school every Monday. I have little doubt that my spoken English improved immeasurably because of their attention and example, especially in accent, diction and rhythm.

3. Singapore parents have opted overwhelmingly for English as the first language of instruction of their children. The English language has given us a head-start in our industrialization; it is the foundation of our service sector, like banking, and in an international business like SIA, either in the cockpit, or in the cabin, or at Singapore Airport. It is foolish to teach our children a Singaporean variety of English when, with some effort and extra cost, we can teach them standard grammatical English. Native English speakers can help remove the distortions in Singaporean English. It is the result of transposing Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, Hakka, Malay, and Tamil consonant and vowel values, sentence structures and speech rhythms into English.

4. I have not yet received reports of the interaction between our recent recruits of native English teachers and our Singaporean teachers. I have, however, received reports of the unhappiness, perhaps the discomfiture, of our own English-language teachers at having their students compare them to the native English speakers as models of speech. I understand their feelings. I must confess, however, that I find it nothing demeaning or derogatory of our teachers to get our students to emulate the standard English speaker. The simple question is: Do we want the next generation to speak slovenly, mangled English, or English that can be understood by English speakers the world over? Why not give Singapore children a chance, when their speech habits can still be easily

reformed, to learn standard English? When Dr Goh Keng Swee took over the Ministry, he came to the same conclusion as I earlier had: to improve standards of spoken and written English, we must recruit native English speakers. We have always had some native English speakers teaching in our schools these last twenty years of PAP government, but too few scattered over a few schools. Most of them were missionaries or VSO's (Voluntary Service Officers) from UK or Canada.

5. Singaporean teachers feel unhappy at the higher salaries paid to native English teachers. Well, this cannot be avoided. We have to pay them what will bring them to Singapore – the market rate in UK plus an extra to attract them to Singapore. I frequently meet expat bankers, executives of multinationals, indeed occasionally expat officers working for the Singapore government on contract, who are paid more than I am. I have learned not to let it disturb me. As a result, Singapore has thrived and prospered. The work has to be done. If we do not have Singaporeans already with the experience and expertise, employ expats, the best we can afford from wherever they are, and the work will be done. All Singaporeans will benefit.

6. There is a unit in the Ministry of Education to help these expat teachers to adjust to Singapore. If there are complaints against specific English teachers for poor teaching or bad examples to students, this unit will sort the problems out. Instead, disgruntled teachers, individually and through the Teachers' Union, have lobbied Dr Lau Teik Soon, MP attached as adviser to AUPE, to air their dissatisfaction in Parliament. On many a previous occasion, Mr Lawrence Sia Khoon Seong, MP for Moulmein and President of the Singapore Teachers' Union, had urged these and other points raised by Dr Lau with me. I suppose it was his duty. Any parents who, like Dr Lau, does not want his son taught by native English speakers will have their wishes respected. After we have completed the recruiting for all secondary schools, we shall keep a few schools without native English speakers for parents who wish to keep their children free from contamination by native English teachers.

7. So far, the argument has turned on economic and cultural grounds. I hope it will never drift into jingoism and xenophobia. Singapore's development and prosperity have been due to the complete absence of anti-foreign sentiments.

There are 20,000 foreign professionals in Singapore: Americans, Japanese, British, Germans, French, and others. Several communities are so large that they run their own schools. Without them, we would never have made the grade with the speed we have. An American engineer in Singapore costs about three times a

Singaporean engineer; so the American Business Council of Singapore has been urging the EDB to improve the quality of our Polytechnic and University of Singapore graduates by postgraduate and extramural courses in order that Singaporean engineers can improve their knowledge and management skills and take over from the Americans, making their operations cheaper and more profitable. Our engineers, accountants, managers, bankers are learning faster working with these foreign counterparts than they ever have done by themselves, learning from each other's inexperience, experimenting, by trial and error, to improve on basics they learnt at university.

8. The government is also determined to get Singaporeans to speak standard Mandarin. Our Mandarin announcers over SBC and our teachers at the Institute of Education will undergo speech re-training courses at the Nantah Language Centre. SBC has recruited three native Mandarin speakers from Taiwan who will speak standard Mandarin. It was not supported by the Mandarin news section. They claimed that the Peking accent is unnatural and will sound affected for Chinese Singaporeans. I overruled these objections. The native English teachers can take comfort that even native Chinese speakers are not warmly received.

9. When I started learning Mandarin, I made it a point of getting native speakers of Mandarin, people born and bred in Peking. I do not speak Mandarin as fluently as the Singapore Chinese-school graduates. But when abroad, in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or US, my Mandarin is better understood than Singaporean Mandarin; I had chosen native Mandarin speakers to be my teachers.

10. Singapore is not ever going to set the standards in any of our four official languages. There are centres of population bigger than ours which decide how these four languages are spoken, written and developed. We have not recruited native Malaysian or Indonesian teachers for Malay because Malay Singaporean MPs have insisted that they already speak standard Malay. Indeed, they have reminded me that Riau Malay is the basic for Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia. And Tamil is not a dialect of Hindi as Hokkien is of Mandarin.

Tamils tell me that our Tamil announcers and teachers speak standard Tamil.

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