

Forum: Mixing of languages not a handicap, but linguistic prowess at work

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Mr Teo Kok Seah's letter is thought-provoking (Many Singaporeans struggle with language proficiency, March 23).

However, Singaporeans' ability to pick words from different languages to form sentences can hardly be labelled as a struggle with language proficiency.

If anything, it demonstrates the linguistic prowess of Singaporeans and their ability to be effective communicators - after all, the use of language is to enable ideas, thoughts and opinions to be communicated.

True, some people are only monolingual at best and do struggle with mastering more than one language, but the ability of such people to "campur" words to form "rojak" sentences to communicate how "jialat" a situation is, points to their savoir faire and shows that they do know multiple languages - if only certain words - which is nothing to be ashamed of.

The sentence I just created contains two Malay words (meaning "mix" and "a mixture"), one Hokkien word (meaning "dire") and a French expression for "finesse", and I believe most people can understand what I was trying to convey.

The point is that communication takes place, and conversations become more lively and colourful.

The onus is also on the listener to be smart and savvy enough to discern and pick up the message being directed at him.

Also, I am not suggesting that we write a scientific report or a medical journal the way I constructed the sentence above, with a smattering of foreign words, but how many of us talk like we are walking scientific reports?

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