Poor language skills should not be tolerated

BY ABDOULAH LUQMAN HUSSIN

THE university is an institution of which we expect certain standards of teaching quality and sophistication. Hardly anyone holds Queen's English as a de facto requirement for teachers, but should students put up with lecturers with poor grammar, and accents that leave us scratching our heads in puzzlement?

This semester, I have unfortunately been privy to a lecturer who mangles his words to such an extent that his lectures have become sheer comedy. Many of us break out in giggles when he mispronounces words like "sheet". Judging by the students' complaints that I have heard, it seems that this case is not an isolated example.

I believe that there is a sizeable minority whose speaking skills may be passable during an interview, but set them loose in a lecture theatre where hundreds of students rely on their communication of ideas, and the outcome is frustration and annoyance. True, variations in accent and nuances of language should be expected with greater internationalisation of our teaching faculty. However, a concern shared among students here is that the research ability of university lecturers has been given priority over their teaching ability.

Poor language skills should not be tolerated in a place where students rely on oral communication to learn. Perhaps it is time that would-be lecturers are made to deliver trial lectures where they are assessed on their language abilities and how well they are able to convey important ideas. We should not settle for anything less.

Student went too far

BY TEO CHIN KER

I HAVE come across a few lecturers with thick accents that leave us giggling. To me, being foreign does not matter — language ability does.

I was raised on a diet of American cartoons and love my MTV. To me, foreign accents can be trying at times but can be cultivated if both parties keep a willingness to learn new things from them. We might risk being left behind if we are not open-minded enough to accept something as simple as a different accent.

Communication is a two-way street

BY MAZHIN KHAMIS

WHEN I observe a Singaporean conversing with foreigners, I often notice that the former adjusts his accent in a manner he thinks would make him better understood.

Are we simply adapting to our external environment or ashamed of who we are and the way we speak? I feel it is just a matter of getting used to a person's accent and there is no need for either party to tone down their accent.

Education is not just about accumulating knowledge, but it is also about making friends with classmates from overseas as well as having foreign lecturers. So many of my friends pass off places at local universities just so they can study overseas to immerse themselves in a different way of life and broaden their minds.

In a way, students from local tertiary institutions are given the opportunity to experience what their peers studying abroad are experiencing. Instead of expecting foreigners to change the way they speak to suit local students, we should take it as an opportunity to learn new things from them.

We might risk being left behind if we are not open-minded enough to accept something as simple as a different accent. The writer is a recent graduate of Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Knowledge more important than accent

BY TEO YUI LING

WHEN an NTU student single-handedly last week started a campaign against his lecturers — who are incomprehensible because of their thick accents, he says — it created a firestorm of controversy. Some 20 Youthink writers responded to the issue. This is a selection of the views that came in.

When the writer is a sociology major at the National University of Singapore

When it comes to the issue of thick accents, he feels that the sooner we accept them, the better.

Adeline Koh is doing her honours at the National University of Singapore

I HAVE occasionally come across professors with foreign accents and poor English, but this does not negate my knowledge. I have learnt to bear with it. Students can always find ways to get around this by doing additional reading or asking questions.

I think the knowledge the professors possess is more important than how they speak.

Sangaran Subramaniam is a first-year electronics engineering student at NUS.

Lecturers deserve basic level of respect

BY NUSAN MAAHIN

NO MATTER who they are, or how well they speak, our lecturers deserve a basic level of respect, and we should attend classes.

I believe it is the responsibility of both the student and the professor to make the education process work. Having lowly English does not make one a lousy educator.

That said, the school administration must make sure that it is more careful in screening an educator's ability to teach during the hiring process.

Teng Yi Ling is a second-year business student at the Singapore Management University

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