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**SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER OF STATE,
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FOR THE 4TH INSPIRING TEACHER OF
ENGLISH AWARDS CEREMONY, 7:00PM, WEDNESDAY 11TH
OCTOBER, 2011, THE POD, NATIONAL LIBRARY BUILDING**

Mr Goh Eck Kheng,

Chairman of the Speak Good English Movement,

Ms Yeoh Chee Yan,

2nd Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education

Ms Ho Peng,

Director General of Education,

Principals, teachers, students and friends,

1. I am very happy to join you this evening for the annual Inspiring Teacher of English Award. Tonight, we honour eight outstanding teachers of English from our primary and secondary schools.

2. The subject of the English language is always emotive and always stirs up great interest amongst all Singaporeans, regardless of age or background, race or religion. The many different perspectives and views we have on the language seem

almost equal to our obsession with food. This is perfectly understandable. English is important - not merely to Singapore's economy and governance, but also to our national identity, culture and psyche.

3. We need English to communicate with both our fellow Singaporeans and with the outside world. We all know how small Singapore is and how we must partner others to survive. We are a cosmopolitan city, and highly-connected to the global network – on a scale that other communities of a similar size to ours are not.

4. What this means is that we must all develop the ability to communicate in a form of English that will be clearly and readily understood in all countries – in America, Australia, England, Europe, and also in developing countries like India, Africa and elsewhere. Some call this form of English, Standard English. Some call it good English, MOE uses the label: “internationally acceptable English.” Whatever the name, the message is clear. Whenever the situation, audience or our purpose requires it, we must be able to effectively communicate in a form of English that is understood internationally. Effective communication is about more than just our ability to speak the language. We need to be able to engage, persuade, influence and motivate our partners, associates and colleagues when we speak. This goes far beyond a mere functional command of English.

5. How do we ensure that Singaporeans acquire the ability to effectively communicate in internationally acceptable English? The first step is to recognize that language is not just a subject you learn in the classroom, but something you use in day-to-day life. This means that one must have the motivation to acquire the language and to internalise it through frequent usage, and through exposure to the right environment.

6. This is exactly what the Speak Good English Movement seeks to do through its yearly campaigns. With the support of its partners, the Movement also provides resources and activities to reach out to different groups of Singaporeans. This year's theme, "How you speak makes a difference", is a call to all Singaporeans to be good role models of English to our children so that they can learn and acquire the language through daily immersion. We can all set our young an example by role-modelling good English in our family roles as mothers, fathers, uncles, aunties, brothers and sisters.

7. Our schools also play a crucial role, especially for children who do not come from English-speaking homes. And within the schools, our teachers play a vital role, as standard-bearers of the language. I have visited several schools over the past few months, and am glad to see much improvement in our efforts to bring the English language to life. In the past, we emphasised writing. I still remember English lessons when I was in school – the teacher would write an essay topic on the blackboard, and we would spend the most of the class time writing the essay. There was little class interaction or active use of the language.

8. Today the teaching environment is completely different. Our teachers use different techniques, tools and platforms – performing arts, oral presentations, debating sessions etc – to make English interesting and relevant. Classrooms are no longer filled with students quietly writing essays, but are alive with discussions and meaningful interactions, both between teacher and students, and also amongst the students themselves as they engage in peer-to-peer learning.

9. The eight winners of our Inspiring English Teacher Awards this year have done all this and more. They have personally taken the extra effort to engage their

students. They have found innovative ways to actively involve their students to speak good English on a regular basis. So to all the winners of the award – Ms Pamela Kiew, Mr Edwin Tan, Ms Gladys Ng, Mr Julian Victor, Ms Sazaina Koh, Mrs Lee Poh Lin, Ms Shirley Teo, and Ms Anna Mathew – well done, and congratulations to all of you!

10. I hope this award will motivate you to constantly seek to improve your own appreciation of the language, and find new ways to foster the same love and appreciation of English in your students and amongst your fellow teachers. Indeed, many past winners of the award have been working closely with the English Language of Institute of Singapore on activities to promote the effective learning of English across our schools. We hope to continue this good tradition. So don't be surprised if you receive a call very soon from Wai Yin and her team at ELIS!

11. Developing a high level of English language competency cannot be the work of our English language teachers alone. All teachers of mathematics, science, humanities and other subjects that use English as the medium of instruction must also serve as role models of good English. MOE is therefore taking a "whole school" approach to foster an overall culture of good English. We are enhancing our teacher capacity in English language usage, and promoting practices and activities that encourage the use of good English. MOE also provides a one-off starting fund to every school joining the programme. 40 schools are currently in Phase one of the programme, and 43 more schools will be joining the programme from next January. All schools will be on board by 2014

12. MOE will also continue to support all schools with resources and instructional material. One aspect of this is in grammar. I am mindful that it is not easy to explain

to young children the injunctions of grammar. I remember going through the classic reference book “First Aid in English” as a young boy and being rather overwhelmed by all the rules about nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns. But grammar is the *sine qua non* of a language. A good understanding of grammar enables one to master the form and ordering of words. Our children still need a good foundation in grammar to complement the many programmes we have to encourage them to read widely and to speak good English.

13. Tonight, I am pleased to launch a new resource – the text book, *About Grammar – Intermediate*. This is the second in a series of grammar books collaboratively developed by MOE and NIE for our upper primary school students. *About Grammar - Intermediate* is specially written for young learners aged eleven and above. The activities in the book offer different levels of challenges to meet the different needs of different students. The book explains complex grammatical concepts with illustrations and humour. It seeks to make grammar fun and interesting. When you put this together with an inspiring teacher, I think we have a winning combination.

14. In closing, I would like to thank the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for organising this event and the English Language Institute of Singapore and British Council for their support. By organizing this award together, we are sending a strong message to all teachers about the impact a good English teacher has on his or her students. The work we do will help our children and fellow Singaporeans become effective communicators in the English language, who are able to hold their own at home and abroad.