

How well do you know your Singlish

English is widely spoken in Singapore... or it is? Many first-time visitors have been confounded by the colloquialisms that pepper Singaporeans' speech. This is because we speak very quickly (or so it's been said) and with a distinct Singaporean accent. Through the years, Singaporeans have developed their own brand of English fondly referred to as 'Singlish'.

With our multi-racial background, it's not surprising that 'Singlish' borrows from the many different languages spoken in Singapore. Here's a collection of 'Singlish' terms which you might find handy on your visit to Singapore.

Action (verb)

Derived from the English language meaning to show off.
Example: That fellow always like to action, walking around with his Rolex over his shirt sleeves.

Arrow (verb)

Derived from the English language meaning to be given a task that you don't want to do.
Example: I was arrowed to paint this wall.

Blur (adj)

Derived from the English language meaning does not know what is going on.
Example: He hasn't read up on the background to this project and was very blur at the meeting.

Boh-Chup (adj)

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning couldn't care less.
Example: Ah, boh-chup, I'm not going to hand in my assignment

Chim (adj) Pronounced 'cheem'.

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning profound.
Example: The professor's lecture was very chim.

Chope (verb)

Derived from the English language meaning to reserve.
Example: It's free seating at the concert, we need to get there early to chope seats for our group.

Gostun (verb)

Derived from the English language (go stern) meaning to reverse.
Example: He overshot the turning so had to gostun back up the road.

Havoc (adj)

Derived from the English language meaning wild and uncontrollable.
Example: That person is very havoc, always out late every night.

Kayu (adj) Pronounced 'kah-yoo'.

Derived from the Malay language meaning dumb or stupid.
Example: How come he is so kayu? Teach him so many times and he still cannot do it.

Kiasu (adj) Pronounced 'kee-a-soo'.

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning afraid to lose out to others or not to lose face.
Example: He sent his family to line up in different queues for the same item, so kiasu.

Lah

The most famous of Singaporean expressions used at the end of sentences for emphasis.
Example: Very funny, lah!

Langgar (verb)

Derived from the Malay language meaning to collide.
Example: This van suddenly pulled out and langgar my car.

Obiang (adj)

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning ugly or outdated.
Example: This dress is so obiang! Who is going to buy it?

Pai seh (adj) Pronounced 'pie-say'.

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning embarrassed or shy.
Example: That's the third time I've forgotten her name. So pai seh.

Shiok (adj) Pronounced 'shee-oak'.

Derived from the Malay language (Straits Chinese) meaning fantastic or marvellous.
Example: That prawn mee soup was shiok!

Sekali

A word meaning suddenly.
Example: "I was about to make a right turn. Sekali this car appears from nowhere and nearly langgar me!"

Solid (adj)

Derived from the English language meaning great or superb.
Example: Did you see how he scored the goal? Solid, man!

Sotong (adj)

Derived from the Malay language meaning does not know what is going on. Similar meaning to 'blur'. (Sotong is the Malay word for octopus which squirts ink and clouds everything.)
Example: This has been going on for months, didn't you know? Sotong!

Suaku (noun) Pronounced 'soo-ah-koo'.

Derived from the Hokkien dialect meaning country bumpkin.
Example: Don't be so suaku lah, don't you know what a VCD player is?

Terok (adj)

Derived from the Malay language meaning troublesome or difficult.
Example: That customer was very terok.

Tompang (verb) Pronounced 'tome-pang'.

Derived from the Malay language meaning to ride on or request a favour.
Example: You're going to the post office? Can I tompang some letters to be mailed?

Ulu (adj) Pronounced 'oo-loo'.

Derived from Malay language meaning rural or a deserted place.
Example: This place is so ulu, you hardly see a single soul around even on weekends.

Ya Ya (adj) An expression meaning boastful or arrogant.

Example: Wah, he's so ya ya.