

# ENGLISH TUTOR SPEAKS

By Lilian Kek Siew Yick

**S**ean Patrick Sta Maria has been tutoring at OUM for five years. A lecturer and language consultant, he tutors first to fourth year students on TESL methodology and literature. Sean, who is 40, originated from Malacca and is currently attached to the Petaling Jaya Learning Centre. I interviewed him recently to find out what he thought about the transition from Bahasa Malaysia to English at OUM.

**Lilian:** *What do you think are the pros of this transition?*

**Sean:** The learning process will be more hand in glove as students will focus on a language which is more predominant in journals, established textbooks and other academic or scholarly publications. It will also help as students will begin to read, think, write and articulate their thoughts in English without having to move from one language to another which in the past has resulted in very mediocre expression of thought and ideas. Later, it will enable them to integrate better into the real working environment. As students are encouraged to pursue lifelong learning, a better command of English can only help them in their pursuit of knowledge.

**Lilian:** *What do you think are the cons of this transition?*

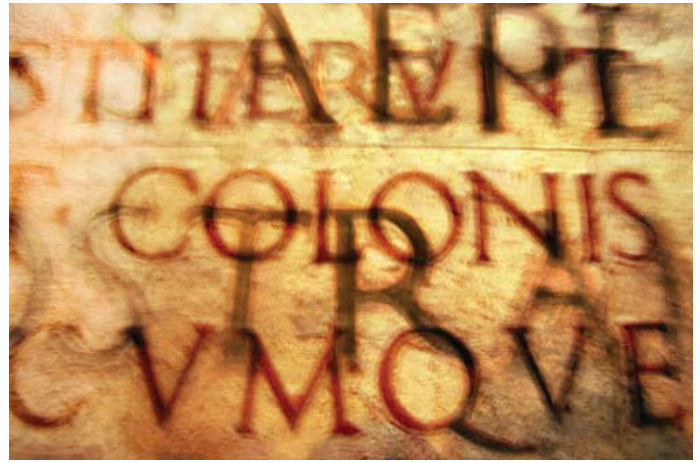
**Sean:** Some might see this move as undermining the status of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language. Also, students who have had their entire schooling in Bahasa Malaysia might feel discouraged by the transition.

**Lilian:** *What are some challenges concerning this transition that you expect? How can these be resolved?*

**Sean:** Students will struggle with the reading materials within and without the prescribed texts. Writing their thoughts accurately, cogently and coherently might be another problem. Hence, there is a need for them to undergo intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pre-courses based on their language proficiency.

**Lilian:** *How do you prepare your students for this transition?*

**Sean:** By being a motivating tutor, taking the trouble to help them along this journey and making them aware of the benefits.



**Lilian:** *In your opinion as an experienced English language tutor, what is the best way to learn English Language?*

**Sean:** Based on Stephen Kristen's acquisition theory, which I strongly subscribe to, learning a language should be through reading and communicating in the target language. Grammar should be learnt in context and not taught in a discrete way.

**Lilian:** *How could a student improve his or her English?*

**Sean:** By getting exposure through reading graded texts if necessary and aural-oral exposure to the target language.

**Lilian:** *How do you think this transition will benefit OUM, its students and tutors as a whole?*

**Sean:** It will allow and facilitate everyone's entry into the exclusive realm of academia.

**Lilian:** *Do you think tutors require any support changing from teaching in Bahasa Malaysia to teaching in English? What sort of help do they need?*

**Sean:** They may need to improve on delivery in succinct English. There is also a need for tutorial techniques to get students involved in the process of learning and not shut them off because of the language barrier. **TCX**