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Don't let our English go to the dogs

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I WAS once accused of calling a university lecturer a dog when I told her that she was "barking up the wrong tree". The woman had her education in Malaysia in the 1970's, and therefore, it was not surprising that she was not familiar with English idiomatic phrases.

The expression means she is on the wrong track, and has nothing to do with dogs.

Recently some Malaysians felt offended because a Singapore columnist used the expression `top dog' in her article on "A Tale Of Two Democracies" in the Straits Times on March 25 when referring to Malaysia's unchanged political leadership.

Idiomatically `top dog' means `victor' or `master' and in fact has no religious or racial connotation because an idiom is a form of expression peculiar to a language and in this case the English language.

We should be proud that our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is acknowledged as the Si Fu (master) in Third World countries.

Before our English goes to the dogs as evidenced by the drop in the percentage of passes in the 1999 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination, the Ministry of Education should take immediate remedial action as English is a compulsory second language in the school curriculum.