

# Errors made in editing

I WISH to thank *The Star* for publishing my letter on Aug 8 under the heading 'Quality English teachers needed to raise proficiency' (not in *Mind Our English*).

However, I was dismayed to find that two sentences in my letter had been 'corrected', rendering them, unfortunately, grammatically incorrect. Wouldn't it be a case of the pot calling the kettle black if I were 'credited' with these mistakes? Hence, I have no choice but to write to you with the hope that you would indulge me by printing this letter. My credibility as an English teacher is at stake here.

In my letter, I had written, "Even if every subject were taught in English, the primary objective of improving English proficiency would not be achieved if teachers themselves were not proficient." This sentence should not have been changed to the present tense.

The structure "If .... were" was used in my sentence to indicate a hypothetical meaning. The conditions in this type of sentence structure range from the possible, the possible but improbable, to the completely unreal. In my letter, I was trying to envisage a situation which was very improbable, i.e. every subject being taught in English.

Since the conditional clause "Even if every

subject were taught in English," is in the past tense, the rest of the sentence should also be in the past tense. In this particular sentence, the verb "were" does not indicate an action that has happened. (In the informal style, however, "was" may be used instead, e.g. If I was younger, I would play tennis.)

I would now like to draw attention to another sentence which was 'corrected'.

I had written, "It is high time the Education Ministry took a long hard look at the root causes of poor English proficiency before embarking on more ambitious schemes involving a lot of time, effort and money." The verb "took" should not have been changed to "takes".

The expression "It is time ..." is always followed by a verb in the past tense, either (a) simple past tense or (b) continuous past form. For example: (a) It is high time I wrote to him again. (b) It's high time I was leaving.

The expression "It's high time ..." is not to be confused with "It's time to ..."

I hope you will let your readers (including my students) read my explanations so that we can continue to use your newspaper as a teaching/learning tool in the campaign for better English proficiency among Malaysians.

- Helen Kuala Lumpur