

# Criticism of English test 'mistakes' brushed aside

Cynthia Wan

The Examinations Authority yesterday brushed aside accusations that its mock benchmark test for English-language teachers was riddled with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes.

The authority admitted to a number of "slips" but rejected claims in a newspaper advertisement taken out by Maria College private school that the papers contained more than 60 mistakes.

The two-page advertisement pointed out that, among other things, the mock test asked teachers to correct the errors in each of the numbered "phrases". It said the word should have been "clauses". In another instance, "even though" was spelt "even through".

The exam papers were distributed to schools to help prepare teachers for the new Language Benchmark Assessment.

The authority said that while there were several slips, most of the accusations were inaccurate and based on grammatical interpretation.

Professor Gregory James, director of the language centre at the HK University of Science and Technology, said: "There are different standards of writing and speaking: the American, the British and so on. It's a mistake to say it's faulty to follow the American standard rather the British."

Professor James, who was not involved in producing the mock papers, argued that grammar changed and that there should be a balance between "grammaticality" and "acceptability".

"Grammar books should not be followed slavishly, otherwise you will have no creativity in your writing," he said. "There are technical terms emerging very fast. Now we've e-mail, e-commerce and they've broken the rules of grammar, if you like." He said the



Examinations Authority secretary Choi Chee-cheong yesterday admitted to several slips in the mock benchmark tests for English-language teachers but promised that "the real test will be a proper one". Dickson Lee

English used in the papers was "consistent standard British English".

Authority secretary Choi Chee-cheong said: "We admit that there are spelling errors and typos in the papers but they are only careless mistakes which unfortu-

nately weren't spotted during proof-reading. But I can assure you, when it comes to the real test, it will be a proper one."

The school's advert also criticised excessive use of the passive voice, giving rise to problems of clarity, burying subjects and

causing wordiness. Professor James said 25 per cent of adjectives were in the passive voice.

The authority promised to correct all the mistakes before sending them out to schools again.

Teachers' unions have described the benchmark test for

## Language lessons

**Example:** "even through there may be some occasional errors".

**Advertisement's claim:** This should be *though* not *through*.  
**Examinations Authority response:** A genuine typographical error admitted.

**Example:** A wide variety of appropriate means for connecting utterances are used.

**Claim:** Subject and verb do not agree in number.  
**Response:** Acceptable.

**Example:** The *editors encourages* the use of informal style.

**Claim:** Subject and verb do not agree in number.  
**Response:** This is taken out of context. The first part of the sentence "The editors of *Wired Magazine*" and the second part "encourages the use of informal style" are not supposed to be put together.

**Example:** He asked me where I live (lived).

**Claim:** Wrong sequence of tense occurs in the sentence.  
**Response:** Acceptable.

**Example:** *Indiscriminate copying* from the passage will penalised.

**Claim:** The meaning is not clear.

**Response:** Acceptable. It has been commonly used.

more than 18,000 English-language and Putonghua teachers as an insult to professional standards.

The launch, originally set for next month, is expected to be deferred by the Education and Manpower Bureau.