

## Grammar Guru 4

### V Saraswathi

Why is English so hard to learn? Here's a poetic answer to this worrying query:

*We'll begin with a **box** and the plural is **boxes**,*

*But the plural of **ox** should be **oxen**, not **oxes**.*

*The one fowl is **goose** but two are **geese**,*

*Yet the plural of **noose** should never be **neese**!*

*You may find a lone **mouse** or a lot of **mice**,*

*But the plural of **house** is **houses**, not **hice**.*

So, our English, I think, you'll agree

Is the trickiest language you ever did see!

In a sense, English is much simpler than Sanskrit. It has only singular and plural forms for nouns, but Sanskrit has a third category, Dual, which refers to two items.

All of us are familiar with the basic rule: add an 's' to a noun to form its plural. But wait, there's a catch! You can say *book-books*; but when you pronounce **dogs**, you must say **dogz**.. So when do you add 's' and when do you add 'z' when you speak? If a noun ends in /p, t, k/, known as *voiceless* sounds, you add 's'. If a word ends in a vowel, or /b, d, g/, /m, n, ng/, /l/, you add 'z'. Is that all? Sorry, no. We haven't finished yet!

When a noun ends in 's', 'sh', 'ch' (as in *church*), 'j', (as in *judge*), or 'x', we add 'es' to the singular form to get the plural.

What happens when a word ends in 'f'? Well, each word seems to be highly idiosyncratic and defies any logic or rule. More than one **thief** would be **thieves**. But more than one **chief** would be **chiefs**. To make the confusion worse confounded, you are right when you say **dwarfs**, but you are not at all wrong when you say **dwarves**. Both forms are equally acceptable. Guess the plural forms of *scarf*, *loaf* and *gulf*. There's a fifty-fifty chance you may hit it right.

Some nouns are quite possessive about their identity and refuse to don the plural form, come what may. Or rather, the singular and plural forms look alike.

The **deer** runs very fast.

**Deer** are found in large numbers in this campus.

India won the Twenty-Twenty World Cup **series**.

I have watched many **series** of matches, but this one was the most exciting.

Nouns with histrionics disguise themselves as plurals, but are in fact singular. Here are some of these dramatis personae: **mathematics**, **news**, **measles**, **billiards**, **innings**, and **electronics**. On the opposite camp are plural nouns which have no singular form: **scissors**, **spectacles**, **bellows** and **tongs**.

Last but not least are the imported

categories – words borrowed from Latin or Greek, French or Hebrew, are adamant about retaining their original spouse **Radius-radii; monsieur-messieurs; criterion-criteria; cherub-cherubim.**

Are you thoroughly fed up? Disgusted? Infuriated? Here's something to cheer you up from the great grammarian Frank Palmer:

*What is singular at the top and plural at the*

*bottom?*

You must be a super genius if you have guessed the answer: **trousers.**

**[Editor's Note: This is part of a series of articles contributed by the author and published earlier in The Times of India, Education Times from May 2008 to May 2013. We are thankful to the author to permit us to publish those articles in our journal.]**

### **Some useful web tools for speaking skills**

**English Central** (<http://www.englishcentral.com/>)

English Central is a video site bringing voice to learners. It makes use of both speech recognition and text-to-speech facilities for language learning.

#### **Online Voice Recording Tools**

**Audiopal** (<http://www.audiopal.com>)

**Vocaroo** (<http://vocaroo.com/>)

Both Audiopal and Vocaroo are very simple voice recording tools. You don't need to sign up in these sites. You can record your speech and download it as an mp3 file from these sites. You can preview your recording and can email it to anyone right from these sites. Additionally, Audiopal offers some more facilities. You can record your speech by making phone calls to the numbers given in Audiopal.

#### **Podcasting Tools**

**Podomatic** (<http://www.podomatic.com>)

**Spreaker** (<http://www.spreaker.com>)

**Audioboom** (<https://audioboom.com>)

A podcast is an audio broadcast over the web. It is broken up into parts or episodes. Most podcasts are similar to news radio programs and deliver information on a regular basis, but they can also be comedy shows, special music broadcasts or talks. You as a teacher can set up a podcasting channel in Podomatic, Spreaker, or Audioboom.

**Voki** (<http://www.voki.com>)

Voki lets you create customized speaking characters. Voki can be an effective tool to practise speaking skills in literature classes. It encourages creativity and interactivity in your classes.

#### **WhatsApp groups**

Whatsapp offers another opportunity for language learners to practise their speaking skills. Teachers can create a WhatsApp group for their classes. Learners can record their speeches (up to 1 minute) and can share them in the group. This allows interactivity and peer support in your speaking skills class.

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