

Headline	English as she is spoke		
Date	25 July 2003		
Media Title	Streets	Section	Comment
Page No	32	Size	6colx21cm

# English as she is spoke

SOME Streets readers, particularly the younger ones, might think we made an embarrassing mistake in the headline for this column.

Surely the last word must be "spoken". It could well be, but the headline as it is, is not wrong grammatically. The phrase is sound English but is not used much these days.

And this is one example why learning English is both a breeze for those who have mastered it and a vexation for many beginners because of the language's many and varied exceptions, aberrations and quirks, in both grammar and pronunciation.

After I wrote a recent column on the need for good grammar as a prerequisite to speaking good English, and pronouncing words correctly, two friends sent me the following hilarious and enlightening piece which I must share with readers.

It is useful for students of the language - to recognise that in every language there are the exceptions to rules. I do not know who this author is and I apologise for not mentioning this wonderful piece to him or her. But it is obvious that the writer wanted this to be shared by all who hold the English language in awe and others who are convinced it is the most awful language to learn.

So here goes:

We'll begin with a box, and the plural is boxes;  
But the plural of ox became oxen not oxes.  
One fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,  
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.  
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice;  
Yet the plural of house is houses, not hices.  
If the plural of man is always called men,  
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?  
If I spoke of my foot and show you my feet,  
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?  
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,  
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?  
Then one may be that, and three would be those,  
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose,  
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.  
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,  
But though we say mother, we never say methren.  
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,  
But imagine the feminine, she, shis and shim.

Some other reasons to be grateful if you grew up speaking English:

- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- The farm was used to produce produce.
- The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
- We must polish the Polish furniture.
- He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- At the army base, a bass was painted on the head of a bass drum.
- I did not object to the object.
- The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
- They were too close to the door to close it.
- The back does funny things when the does are present.
- A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
- To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
- The wind was too strong for us to wind the sail.
- After a number of Novocain injections, my jaw got number.
- Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
- I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
- How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?
- I spent last evening evening out a pile of dirt.

Screwy pronunciations can mess up your mind. For example: If you have a rough cough, climbing can be tough when going through the bough on a tree.

Let's face it, English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant or ham in hamburger, neither apple nor pine in pineapple.

English muffins weren't invented in England. We take English for granted. But if we explore its paradoxes, we find that quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

And why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham?

Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend? If teachers taught, why didn't

preachers praught?

If a vegetarian cuts vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? If you are disgruntled, were you previously grunted? And what ungrunted you?

Sometimes I think all the folks who grew up speaking English should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane.

In what other language do people recite at a play and play at a recital?

Ship by truck and send cargo by ship? Have noses that run and feet that smell? How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise-guy are opposites?

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, in which you fill in a form by filling it out and in which an alarm

goes off by going on.

If dad is pop, how come mom isn't mop?

The writer can be contacted at [streets@spk.com.sg](mailto:streets@spk.com.sg)



By PHILIP LEE

