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Readers' Forum

English grammar -II

Item 4.3.3 bears the caption "collective nouns having no singular form" and under this as examples the words cattle and police have been cited. But the readers can easily see that both the words are very much singular in form. So the caption of the item is a travesty of truth hence misleading too. Of course, the distinctive characteristics of the two words are that 'cattle' is always treated as plural and 'police' though always singular in form is used only with plural verbs. In this context, therefore, the correct caption of the item might have been 'collective nouns always singular in form, but plural in use'.

6. Item 5.2 deals with uncountable nouns. I am now just quoting an entry (translation of English-Bengali mixed sentence of course) of the book that appears under this item: Uncountable noun may also be used in a sentence without any determiner, e.g. Everybody drinks water. Much water is found in the pond. Isn't the word much in the second sentence a determiner? To illustrate the use of uncountable noun without a determiner in a sentence, the book ridiculously prefers a sentence with determiner used before the uncountable noun. The readers have little scope to reflect upon the second sentence otherwise, as it comes as one of the pair of examples under a categorical statement.

7. Item 5.9 deals with possessive forms of nouns. The book under this item formulates a general rule that a singular noun that ends with s adds only apostrophe to it to be singular in the genitive case. Are the grammarians in full agreement with this generalisation? We are in doubt. To the best of our knowledge grammarians hold that when the last syllable of a singular noun begins and ends with s the apostrophe is added to the word; e.g. Moses' laws. But in other cases grammarians prefer apostrophe with s to apostrophe only; e.g. James's hat, Mars's atmosphere, Dickens's novels; etc. The tendency of modern English writers is also in favour of this trend. So the book should have been more careful in formulating such generalisation, may, however, be upheld in the case of been and being. But it is not equally applicable in the

case of be. What's about the use of be in sentences like 'Be honest to command respect of your countrymen or come live with me, and be my love? Doesn't the verb be function independently as finite verb in these sentences? Then, again, under this item, sub-section C contains discussion on the forms and uses of verb do. There is an entry under sub-item (II) which runs as: "To avoid repetition of the foregoing verb of a sentence, do may be used, e.g. Sabina sang well. Yes, she did?" Should we treat the example grammatically proper to illustrate such use of do? Why not rewrite the sentences in example as Did Sabena sing well? Yes she did Or as "Sabina sang well, didn't she".

10. Chapters IV to XIV offer elaborate discussion on parts of speech. In classifying nouns and adjectives the heading used is: "Traditional classification of nouns/adjectives." But in the case of some other parts of speech the heading is shortened as 'classification of adverbs/prepositions etc.' Why this distinction in headings is not however discernible from the book: Does the book intend to present before the readers two classifications of parts of speech—one traditional and the other modern? But no where from the book we could fish out a heading styled as modern classification. Virtually the book in its entirety turns out to be a mess of traditional and modern approaches.

13 We would like no more comments on the deficiency of this text book. But we feel constrained to write about the few excellent qualities the book has. Chapter xxxii and xxxiii are devoted to pronunciation and spelling, two very important grammatical items which many text-books of English Grammar unwisely evade. In fine, we would suggest that to be a standard text-book, the book must undergo thorough revision to remove its inconsistent and misleading aspects as enumerated above and make good the deficiency it has.

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