Let's face it—English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple. English muffins weren't invented in England or French fries in France. Sweetmeats are candies while sweetbreads, which aren't sweet, are meat. 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?

If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth? One goose, 2 geese. So one moose, 2 meese? One index, 2 indices? Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend? If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it? If teachers taught, why didn't preachers prought? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat?

Sometimes I think all the English speakers should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane. In what 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.

How can the weather be hot as hell one day and cold as hell another? Have you noticed that we talk about certain things only when they are absent? Have you ever seen a horseful carriage or a strapful gown, met a sung hero or experienced requited love? Have you ever run into someone who was combobulated, gruntled, ruly, or peccable? And where are all those people who ARE spring chickens or would ACTUALLY hurt a fly? Why is "crazy man" and insult, while to insert a comma and say, "crazy, man!" is a compliment (as when applauding a jazz performance)?

English was invented by people, not computers, and it reflects the creativity of the human race (which, of course, isn't a race at all). That is why, when the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible. And why, when I wind up my watch, I start it, but when I wind up this essay, I end it.

(appendix of Lederer, "Our Queer English Language")

Our Queer English Language

Alice Hess Beveridge

We'll begin with box; the plural is boxes, And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
But the plural of ox is oxen, not oxes. If one is a tooth, and a whole set are teeth
One fowl is a goose, but two are called geese Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?
But the plural of mouse is not ever meese. If a singular this is a plural these
You may find a lone mouse, or a whole nest of mice Should the plural of kiss ever be keese?
But the plural of house is still never hice. We speak of a brother and also call brethren,
If the plural of man is always men And though we say mother we never say methren.
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be pen? Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
If I speak of a foot and you show me two feet, But imagine the feminine she, shis and shim.
Dearest creature in creation,
Study English pronunciation.
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse, and worse.
I will keep you, Suzy, busy,
Make your head with heat grow dizzy.
Tear in eye, your dress will tear.
So shall!! Oh hear my prayer.

Just compare heart, beard, and heard,
Dies and diet, lord and word,
Sword and sward, retain and Britain.
(Mind the latter, how it’s written.)
Now I surely will not plague you
With such words as plaque and ague.
But be careful how you speak:
Say break and steak, but bleak and streak;
Cloven, oven, how and low,
Script, receipt, show, poem, and toe.

Hear me say, devoid of trickery,
Daughter, laughter, and Terpsichore,
Typhoid, measles, topsails, aisles,
Exiles, similes, and reviles;
Scholar, vicar, and cigar,
Solar, mica, war and far;
One, anemone, Balmoral,
Kitchen, lichen, laundry, laurel;
Gertrude, German, wind and mind,
Scene, Melpomene, mankind.

Billet does not rhyme with ballet,
Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.
Blood and flood are not like food,
Nor is mould like should and would.
Viscous, viscous, load and broad,
Toward, to forward, to reward.
And your pronunciation’s OK
When you correctly say croquet,
Rounded, wounded, grieve and sieve,
Friend and fiend, alive and live.

Ivy, privy, famous; clamour
And enamour rhyme with hammer.
River, rival, tomb, bomb, comb,
Doll and roll and some and home.
Stranger does not rhyme with anger,
Neither does devour with clangour.
Souls but foul, haunt but aunt,
Font, front, wont, want, grand, and grant,
Shoes, goes, does. Now first say finger,
And then singer, ginger, linger,
Real, zeal, mauve, gauze, guage and gauge,
Marriage, foliage, mirage, and age.

Query does not rhyme with very,
Nor does fury sound like bury.
Dost, lost, post and doth, cloth, loth.
Job, nob, bosom, transom, oath.
Though the differences seem little,
We say actual but virtual.
Refer does not rhyme with deaf.
Feofer does, and zephyr, heifer.
Mint, pint, seneate and sedate;
Dull, bull, and George ate late.
Scenic, Arabic, Pacific,
Science, conscience, scientific.

Liberty, library, heave and heaven,
Rachel, ache, moustache, eleven.
We say hallowed, but allowed,
People, leopard, towed, but vowed.
Mark the differences, moreover,
Between mover, cover, clover;
Leeches, breeches, wise, precise;
Chalice, but police and lice;
Camel, constable, unstable;
Principle, disciple, label.

Petal, panel, and canal,
Walt, surprise, plait, promise, pal.
Worm and storm, chaise, chaos, chair,
Senator, spectator, mayor.

Tour, but our and succour, four.
Gas, alas, and Arkansas.
Sea, idea, Korea, area,
Psalms, Maria, but malaria.
Youth, south, southern, cleanse and clean.
Doctrine, turpentine, marine.

Compare alien with Italian,
Dandelion and battalion.
Sally with ally, yea, ye,
Eye, i, ay, aye, whey, and key.
Say aver, but ever, fever,
Neither, leisure, skin, deceiver.
Heron, granary, canary,
Crevices and device and aerie.

Face, but prefix, not efface.
Phlegm, phlegmatic, ass, glass, bass.
Large, but target, gin, give, verging,
Ought, out, joust and scour, scouring.
Ear, but earn and wear and tear
Do not rhyme with here but ere.
Seven is right, but so is even.
Hyphen, roughen, nephew Stephen,
Monkey, donkey, Turk and jerk,
Ask, grasp, wasp, and cork and work.

Pronunciation -- think of Psyche!
Is a paling stout and spikey?
Won't it make you lose your wits,
Writing groats and saying grits?
It's a dark abyss or tunnel:
Strewed with stones, stowed, solace,
Islington and Isle of Wight,
Housewife, verdict and indict.

Finally, which rhymes with enough—
Though, through, plough, or dough, or cough?
Hiccough has the sound of cup.
My advice is to give up!!