



The Language Inside Your Brain (plural suffix ‘-es’)

Lesson Objective

In this lesson, children will continue to explore the results of a famous psycholinguistic experiment by Jean Berko often called ‘The Wug Test’ (Berko, 1958). Children will do some of the actual test items, supported by the teacher.

The test items target the plural suffix ‘-es’, which is typically learnt later in development than the suffix ‘-s’. Teachers and speech pathologists can use this lesson to draw children’s attention specifically to the different sounds involved when pronouncing the plural suffix ‘-es’. This will be helpful for both typically developing children and children with language delay.

This lesson can be used in conjunction with a **linked lesson about reading and spelling the plural suffix ‘-es’**. Instructions for this activity are given after this lesson. These skills can also be transferred to reading and spelling the third person singular verb-subject agreement suffix ‘-es’ (e.g., he reaches, she scratches).

Note: Letter names are referred to using single quotes (e.g., ‘s’), while sounds that letters make are referred to using slant brackets (e.g., /s/). We have avoided using international phonetic symbols for these sounds, choosing instead common English spellings when possible (e.g., /ch/ for the sound at the beginning of ‘cherry’). We do, however, use the symbol schwa /ə/ to represent the English vowel sound that typically occurs in unstressed syllables, because this sound can be spelled in many different ways (e.g., mountain, telephone, again, computer, teacher).

Teacher		Students
Slide 1	<p>Today we are going to talk again about some of the clever things that our brains know how to do for us when we talk.</p> <p>Click to reveal boy’s question: Remember, this boy is asking, “How do I know how to talk?”</p> <p>Click to reveal girl’s exclamation: And this girl is saying, “Let’s find out!”</p>	
Slide 2	<p>We already found out that our brains know a lot about what to do when we want to talk about more than one thing.</p> <p>For example, here is a cat.</p>	

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Slide 3	<p>And now there are two of them. There are two...</p> <p>That's right. There are two cats. What sound did we add to cat when there were two of them? Two cat...</p> <p>Yes, we added /s/. What sound?</p>	<p>cats</p> <p>/s/</p> <p>/s/</p>
Slide 4	<p>Now look. Here is a dog.</p>	
Slide 5	<p>And now there are two of them. There are two...</p> <p>That's right. There are two dogs. What sound did we add to dog when there were two of them? Two dog...</p> <p>Yes, we added /z/. What sound?</p> <p>So our brains know that sometimes we add the sound /s/ to a word and sometimes we add the sound /z/ when we want to talk about more than one thing.</p> <p>Let's learn about one more thing our brains know when we talk about more than one thing. To do that, we are going to meet some more imaginary creatures. Ready?</p>	<p>dogs</p> <p>/z/</p> <p>/z/</p>
Slide 6	<p>Look, this is a niz. Can you all say that? A... niz.</p> <p>What does a niz look like?</p> <p>A niz sure is a funny creature.</p>	<p>niz</p> <p>individual children respond</p>
Slide 7	<p>Oh, look. Now there are two of them. There are two...</p> <p>Note: Children may have difficulty supplying this plural form. Berko found that 6- to 7-year-old children have still not reliably acquired this rule. They will often say 'niz' for the plural.</p>	<p>children may say nizzes or niz</p>
Slide 7 continued	<p>This is a tricky one. I would say, "There are two nizzes."</p> <p>What did I say? Let's listen again. There are two...nizzes.</p> <p>Right. There are two nizzes. Emphasise the last sound /əz/ as you say 'nizzes'.</p> <p>Hmmm, we added some sounds to 'niz' when there were two of them. Listen again.</p> <p>Point to one niz as you say: One niz. Point to both nizzes as you say: Two nizzes.</p>	<p>nizzes</p>

[Type here]

	<p>What sounds did we add? Two nizz-/əz/. What sounds?</p> <p>Look amazed. But that's not what we did for 'two cats' and 'two dogs'. Act suspicious. Have you ever seen a niz before? Have you ever said the word 'niz' before? Have you ever said the word 'nizzes' before?</p> <p>But it sounds right when we say 'two nizzes'. That's what we said, right?</p> <p>Wow! Our brains knew what to do, even though we had never heard of a niz before. Amazing!</p>	<p>/əz/</p> <p>no no no</p> <p>yes</p>
Slide 8	<p>Now let's look at another imaginary creature. This is a gutch. Can you all say that? A... gutch.</p> <p>What does a gutch look like?</p> <p>A gutch is another really funny creature.</p>	<p>gutch</p> <p>individual children respond</p>
Slide 9	<p>Oh, look. Now there are two of them. We need to add /əz/ again to talk about them. There are two gutches. Can you say that with me? There are two... gutches.</p> <p>What did you say? Let's listen again. There are two...</p> <p>Oh, right. There are two gutches. Emphasise the last sound /əz/ as you say 'gutches'.</p> <p>We did it again. We added some sounds to 'gutch' when there were two of them.</p> <p>Point to one gutch as you say: One gutch. Point to both gutches as you say: Two gutches.</p> <p>What sounds did we add? Two gutch-/əz/. What sounds?</p> <p>Act suspicious again. Have you ever seen a gutch before? Have you ever said the word 'gutch' before? Have you ever said the word 'gutches' before?</p> <p>But it sounds right when we say 'two gutches'. That's what we said, right?</p>	<p>gutches</p> <p>gutches!</p> <p>/əz/</p> <p>no no no</p> <p>yes</p>

[Type here]

	Wow! Our brains sure are clever. They know how to say 'gutches' even though we had never heard of one before.	
Slide 10	<p>Let's look at one more imaginary creature. This is a tass. Can you all say that? A... tass.</p> <p>What does a tass look like?</p> <p>A tass is another really funny creature.</p> <p>This time, let's see if you can add the sounds on your own when there are two of them. Remember, this is a tass.</p>	<p>tass</p> <p>individual children respond</p>
Slide 11	<p>Now there are two of them. There are two...</p> <p>Yes. What did you say? Let's listen again. There are two...</p> <p>Well done. You did it on your own. There are two tassess. Emphasise the last sound /əz/ as you say 'tassess'.</p> <p>Sometimes we add the sounds /əz/ to the end of a word when we want to talk about more than one thing.</p> <p>Two tass-/əz/. What sound?</p>	<p>tassess</p> <p>tassess!</p> <p>/əz/</p>
Slide 12	<p>Look amazed again. Your brains are so clever! They know that sometimes we choose /s/ for two or more things. Point to the cats. Two... cat-/s/.</p> <p>And sometimes we choose /z/. Point to the dogs. Two... dog-/z/.</p> <p>And sometimes we choose /əz/. Point to the horses. Two... hors-/əz/.</p> <p>Hold up three fingers. Three different sounds.</p> <p>How do we know which one to choose? Do we have to remember whether it is /s/ or /z/ or /əz/ for every word we ever hear?</p>	<p>cats</p> <p>dogs</p> <p>horses</p>
Slide 13	<p>Luckily, we DON'T! Our brains have learnt some rules so they know when to use each sound... even for words you have never heard before, like 'niz' and 'gutch' and 'tass'.</p> <p>So, give your brain a little pat and say, "Thank you brain!"</p>	

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Notes on English plural rules

Niz/Gutch/Tass: We form the plural of words ending in the sounds /s/, /z/, /sh/, /ch/ /dj/and /zh/ (the last sound in the word 'garage') by adding /əz/. Hence, the imaginary words 'niz', 'gutch' and 'tass' become 'nizz/əz/', 'gutch/əz/' and 'tass/əz/'. This rule is typically learnt later than the rules for adding /s/ or /z/ to a noun to make a plural.

Berko, J. (1958). The child's learning of English morphology. *WORD*, 14:2-3, 150-177, doi: 10.1080/00437956.1958.11659661

Plural suffix '-es' reading and spelling lesson

Lesson Objective

Children work on learning to read and spell the plural suffix '-es' in English. The skills taught here can also be transferred to reading and spelling the third person singular subject-verb agreement suffix '-es' (e.g., he rushes, she munches).

Teacher		Students
1	Terminology: Plurals Remember, when we talk about more than one thing, it is called the plural . What is it called?	the plural
2	The plural of cat is... The plural of hat is... The plural of bat is... What do we call it when we talk about more than thing? The...	cats hats bats plural!
3	Writing Plurals We've already learnt one way to write the plural. We add a letter to the end of the word. What letter do we add? Invite an individual child to respond.	's'
4	Yes, we add 's'. Everyone, what letter can we add to make the plural?	's'

[Type here]

5	<p>Write the word 'cup' on the board. Read this word with me. Cup. Help children sound out the word letter by letter if necessary.</p> <p>Now I want to talk about more than one cup. Add and underline 's': cup<u>s</u>. Read my new word.</p> <p>I added 's' to make the plural of 'cup'.</p>	<p>cup</p> <p>cups</p>
6	<p>Terminology: Suffix A letter or letters that we add to the end of a word to change its meaning or the way we use it in a sentence has a special name.</p> <p>Who can remember what it is called? Invite individual child to respond.</p>	<p>a suffix</p>
7	<p>That's right. It's called a suffix. Today we are going to learn another suffix we use for the plural. We use it when the plural makes the sounds /əz/. What sounds?</p> <p>Listen.</p> <p>One glass, two... One brush, two...</p> <p>What sounds can you hear at the end of 'glass/əz/' and 'brush/əz/'? Emphasise the sounds /əz/ as you say the words.</p>	<p>/əz/</p> <p>glasses brushes</p> <p>/əz/</p>
8	<p>Write the word 'brush' on the board. Read this word with me. Brush. Help children sound out the word letter by letter if necessary.</p> <p>Now I am going to add some letters to make 'brushes'. Add 'es' to the word and underline the suffix: brush<u>es</u>.</p> <p>Read the word with me. Brushes. What letters did I add?</p> <p>That's right, 'e' 's' is the suffix we use when the plural makes the sound /əz/.</p>	<p>brush</p> <p>brushes 'e' 's'</p>
9	<p>Guided practice Write the word 'peach' on the board. Read with me. Peach. Help children sound out the word if necessary. If there are two of them, we would have two... What sounds can we hear at the end of 'peaches'? What letters do we need to add to make it plural?</p>	<p>peach</p> <p>peaches /əz/ 'e' 's'</p>

[Type here]

	<p>That's right. We need to add the suffix 'e' 's' for the plural. Call on a child to add the letters 'e' 's' in a different colour. Read the new word with me. Peaches.</p> <p>Note: if children notice that the final sound in these plural forms is /z/, acknowledge this, but explain that we still use the letter 's' so that this suffix looks similar to the plural suffix 's'.</p>	peaches
10	<p>Independent practice Now it's your turn to write some plural words using the suffix 'e' 's'. Students can work in exercise books or on student whiteboards.</p>	
11	<p>Write the word 'bunch'. What word? I bought a bunch of bananas at the shops. Ask children to say the sounds (/b/ /u/ /n/ /ch/) as they write if necessary.</p>	bunch
12	<p>Let's add the suffix 'e' 's' to your word to make it a plural. Write the letters you need to change 'bunch' to 'bunches'.</p> <p>What letters did you add?</p> <p>Show me your work. Check children's work and provide feedback. Read the word with me. Bunches.</p>	children write 'es' 'e' 's' bunches
13	<p>Repeat Steps 10-12 with the following words, reducing support when children are ready. Provide a context of use with each word.</p> <p>bus, sash, dish, mess</p>	
14	<p>Now you know the two ways we write the plural: 's' or 'e' 's'. What are the two ways we write the plural?</p>	's' or 'e' 's'
15	<p>Throughout the day Point out plurals taking the suffix '-es' in material being read throughout the day.</p>	