

ENGLISH NOUNS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN PLURAL FORMATION AND PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

ARE ENGLISH WORDS ENGLISH?

Any language is a living organism in a sense that it is subject to constant changes and development. Contemporary Englishmen would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to communicate with their Anglo-Saxon ancestors; they would probably be lost for words trying to talk to Chaucer and his contemporaries, too. The above difficulties are the result of the differences between Modern (New) English and the English (Old and Middle) spoken by the two groups aforementioned. Those differences reflect changes in grammar, syntax, pronunciation and, above all, vocabulary which the English language has undergone throughout centuries.

Each group of invaders who conquered Britain, from the Romans in 55 BC to the Normans in 1066, brought with them their own customs, traditions and most importantly their language; thus enriching English culture and vocabulary (but at the same time making students of English as a foreign language feel daunted by the task of learning and memorizing it). The very name *Britannia* comes from Latin; the Anglo-Saxons brought words for everyday things like *loaf* and *house*; the Vikings introduced *window* and *husband*; after the Norman Conquest, *beef* and *pork* entered the English language; to name but a few.

However, there is a group of words that have not been fully anglicised and which retain features of the vernacular. The following is a list of English nouns of foreign origin which retain their foreign plural suffixes, and which learners of English frequently find difficult to pronounce. Although many of them can also have a regular English plural form, foreign suffixes are preferred in more formal contexts. Moreover, it should be observed that in some cases a foreign plural indicates a difference in meaning, e.g. *antennae* (parts on the heads of insects) and *antennas* (aerials).

As regards the question posed at the top of this page, there can be no doubt that English nouns, the examples listed below included, are English despite the fact that they originate from various European languages. The ultimate criterion which one can use for assessing their “Englishness” is a good British or American English dictionary.

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1. English nouns of Latin origin

alga - algae	/ældʒiː; ælgiː/
alumna - alumnae	/ə'ɫʌmniː/
antenna - antennae	/æ'n'teniː/
formula - formulae	/'fɔ:mjəliː/
larva - larvae	/'lɑ:vɪː/
alumnus - alumni	/ə'ɫʌmnaɪ/
bacillus - bacilli	/bə'sɪləɪ/
cactus - cacti	/'kæktəɪ/
focus - foci	/'fəʊsəɪ/
fungus - fungi	/'fʌŋɡiː; 'fʌŋɡaɪ; 'fʌndʒaɪ/
radius - radii	/'reɪdiəɪ/
apex - apices	/'eɪpɪsiːz/
appendix - appendices	/ə'pendɪsiːz/
executrix - executrices	/'ɪg'zɛkjʊtrɪsiːz/
index - indices	/'ɪndɪsiːz/
matrix - matrices	/'meɪtrɪsiːz/
addendum - addenda	/ə'dendə/
aquarium - aquaria	/ə'kwɛəriə/
datum - data	/'deɪtə/
emporium - emporia	/em'pɔ:riə/
erratum - errata	/e'ɾɑ:tə/
medium - media	/'mi:djə/
ovum - ova	/'əʊvə/
corpus - corpora	/'kɔ:pərə/
genus - genera	/'dʒenərə/
opus - opera	/'ɒpərə/
apparatus - apparatus	/æpə'reɪtəs/
meatus - meatus	/mi'eɪtəs/
nexus - nexus	/'neksəs/
series - series	/'siəriːz/

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2. English nouns of Greek origin

analysis - analyses	/ə'næləsi:z/
basis - bases	/'beisi:z/
crisis - crises	/'kraisi:z/
ellipsis - ellipses	/ɪ'lɪpsi:z/
genesis - geneses	/'dʒenəsi:z/
nemesis - nemeses	/'neməsi:z/
parenthesis - parentheses	/pə'renθəsi:z/
thesis - theses	/'θi:si:z/
criterion - criteria	/kraɪ'tɪəriə/
ephemeron - ephemera	/ɪ'femərə/
ganglion - ganglia	/'gæŋglɪə/
phenomenon - phenomena	/fə'nɒmɪnə/
dogma - dogmata	/'dɒgmətə/
schema - schemata	/'ski:mətə/
ephemeris - ephemerides	/efɪ'merɪdi:z/
iris - irides	/'aɪrɪdi:z/
proboscis - proboscides	/prəʊ'bɒsɪdi:z/
cyclops - Cyclopes	/saɪ'klɒpi:z/
larynx - larynges	/'lærɪŋdʒi:z/
sphinx - sphinges	/'sfɪŋdʒi:z/
logos - logoi	/'lɒɡɔɪ/

3. English nouns of French origin

adieu - adieux	/ə'dju:z/
beau - beaux	/'bəʊz/
madame - mesdames	/'meɪdæm/
bureau - bureaux	/'bjʊərəʊz/
plateau - plateaux	/'plætəʊz/