SEMI-PSEUDO-PLURALS AND SEMI-QUASI-PSEUDO-PLURALS

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A recent perusal of Webster's Third New International Dictionary has uncovered a number of pseudo-plurals and quasi-pseudo-plurals that were not included in my article in the last issue of this journal (Word Ways 44.2). These new examples are listed in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively:

Figure 1: English pseudo-plurals:

Noun A		Noun B	
DIVE	'the act of diving'	DIVES	'a rich man'
PE	'a Hebrew letter'	PES	'part of the hind limb of a vertebrate'
SPECIE	'money in coin'	SPECIES	'a category of biological classification'
TAP	'a light rap'	TAPS	'a bugle call'
TAW	'a marble'	TAWS	'a whip'
TOOT	'a blast on a wind instrument'	TOOTS	'a woman, girl'
YAW	'an angular displacement'	YAWS	'an infectious disease'

Figure 2: English quasi-pseudo-plurals:

Noun A		Noun B	
ALA	'a Sumerian drum'	ALAS	'an Indonesian people'
BU	'a Japanese coin'	BUS	'a large motorized vehicle'
CRU	'a French vineyard'	CRUS	'a part of the leg'
DA	'Brit. dial., father'	DAS	'Hindu slave'
KA	'the soul of a dead person'	KAS	'a Dutch cupboard'
KAMIA	'an Indian people of California'	KAMIAS	'East Indian evergreen tree'
LI	'a virtue in Confucianism'	LIS	'a flower'
MANA	'a supernatural force'	MANAS	'mental perception in Hinduism'
MANU	'a progenitor of humans in Hinduism'	MANUS	'an Austronesian language'
MARQUE	'a brand of a product'	MARQUES	'a marquess in Sp. speaking countries'
MONA	'a West African monkey'	MONAS	'a genus of flagellates'
NAI	'a barber caste of Hindus'	NAIS	'a river nymph'
NAIA	'a genus of snakes'	NAIAS	'a genus of aquatic plants'
NAO	'a sailing ship'	NAOS	'an ancient temple'
PU	'Scot. var. of pull'	PUS	'a month of the Hindu calendar'
RAJA	'an Indian prince'	RAJAS	'on of the three gunas in Hinduism'
SANTO	'a saint'	SANTOS	'Brazilian coffee'
SI	'a musical note'	SIS	'sister'
TAXI	'a cab'	TAXIS	'the restoration of a body part'

The examples listed above confirm my impressionistic view that (in English) it is easier to find quasi-pseudo-plurals than pseudo-plurals.

As I explained in my earlier article, examples like the ones in Figure 2 do not qualify as pseudo-plurals because they are not pronounced as pseudo-plurals. In particular, the final –S in the words in the Noun B column of Figure 2 is pronounced as [s] and not as [z], which is the normal realization for the plural marker –S after a singular word ending in a vowel, e.g. LLAMA~ LLAMAS.

In my earlier article I was only concerned with the pronunciation of the final –S in the word in the Noun B column above, not with the material preceding that letter. I refer henceforth to that part of the word as the 'root'. A close look at the examples in Figure 1 reveals that the root vowel is the same in certain pairs of words, while it is different in others. Consider TAP~TAPS and TOOT-TOOTS. Clearly, TAPS and TOOTS are pseudo-plurals because the –S is pronounced as [s], as it is in true plurals after P or T (e.g. CAPS, CATS). However, the two pairs differ in terms of the pronunciation of the respective root vowels: In TAP~TAPS the vowels are pronounced the same in both members of the pair, but in TOOT-TOOTS the vowels are not the same. I refer henceforth to the former as a 'pseudo-plural' and to the latter as a 'semi-pseudo-plural'. The same dichotomy holds for quasi-pseudo-plurals: In CRU~CRUS and TAXI~TAXIS from Figure 2 we are clearly not dealing with pseudo-plurality because the –S in CRUS and TAXIS is pronounced as [s], but only CRUS is a true 'quasi-pseudo-plural' because the spoken vowel in CRU and CRUS is the same. By contrast, the example TAXIS is 'semi-quasi-pseudo-plural' because the vowels in TAXIS are not pronounced the same as the vowels in TAXI.

The upshot of the preceding discussion is that it is now possible to establish a much more fine-grained classification of (quasi)-(pseudo)-plurality:

plural:	DOG~DOGS
pseudo-plural:	TAP~TAPS
semi-pseudo-plural:	TOOT~TOOTS
quasi-pseudo-plural:	CRU~CRUS
semi-quasi-pseudo-plural:	TAXI~TAXIS

I make no attempt here to calculate the number of 'quasis' in Figures 1 and 2 or in my previous article.