

Q and A of the Week 你问我答

Less and Fewer

两词区别



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Finn: OK: 5kg of cheese, six eggs, one bottle of vodka...

Jean: 听众朋友们大家好！我是董征，现在正在英国的一家超市里，为大家解答本周的英语问题。

Finn: ...super-strength toilet paper – six rolls – some dog food...

Jean: Finn... 请问你能不能先别忙着看你自己的采购清单好不好！

Finn: Oh yes, sorry. I'm Finn and welcome to Question and Answer of the Week. What's the question again, Jean?

Jean: (*A bit frustrated*) Yes. It's from someone called Royee Z, who asks: "Could you tell me the difference between less and fewer? For example, do you say 'less' or 'fewer' people live in the countryside than five years ago?"

Finn: One tin of... where are the baked beans, Jean...?

Jean: Finn!

Finn: Err, I don't know – I thought more people were living in the countryside now?

Jean: Finn 今天太让人崩溃了。本周 Royee 问的这个问题确实是个比较有代表性的英语用词，程度 *less* 和 *fewer* 都有“更少”的意思，那么我们什么时候该用哪一个词更合适呢？这方面有没有什么规律或使用上的规则，Finn？

Finn: Yes, yes. OK, right, let's answer the question. You use *fewer* when referring to people or things in the plural – things you can count, like bottles, tins or eggs.

Jean: 好，我们通常会用 *fewer* 这个词来形容复数形式的词语。Let's look at your shopping list again, Finn. If you wanted to save money you could buy *fewer* tins of beans, *fewer* eggs, *fewer* bottles of vodka!

Finn: Yes, fewer. And if I did that, I would spend *less* money, and probably *less* time shopping.

Jean: 没错，因为我们在用 *less* 这个词的时候，一般是要跟不可数名词 **uncountable nouns**。比如说 **time** 还有 **money** 都属于不可数名词，就是难分出单个数量或个体概念的名词。

Finn: So we say *fewer* newspapers, but *less* news. And *fewer* rainy days, but *less* rain!

Jean: OK, 这些已经搞清楚了。不过，英语里还是有一些例外的情况 – 比如，我们也可以用 'less' 来修饰单个的数字和价格：

Finn: For example, it should cost less than £20 for all this shopping.

Jean: And with expressions of time 还可以用来形容时间：

Finn: That's right. It will take less than 10 minutes if we hurry up!

Jean: And measurement 还有份量和尺寸：

Finn: Actually, I don't need so much cheese; I'm going to buy less than 5kg after all. Or, it's less than 2km to my house.

Jean: Now let's go back to that question: do we say 'less' or 'fewer' people in the countryside?

Finn: OK, so the word 'people' is countable and in the plural form, so strictly speaking it should be 'fewer', 'fewer people'.

Jean: 严格来讲，应该用 **fewer** – fewer people. 不过我们也经常可以听到同样的说法有人就会用 'less' 这个词。这是因为虽然 **people** 是个可数名词，不过当你用它来形容一大群人，比如说，四百万的人，这个词组的概念听上去就不是可以单个算人的可数名词了，这样的 **people** 意思上就更贴近“群众”的概念。

Finn: Indeed. Now, this is one thing that even native speakers of English struggle with! So don't feel too bad if you get it wrong sometimes. Now... good, oh brilliant! This vodka is on discount.

Jean: Finn, have you finished your shopping yet? 我们可这就要到收银台交钱了。How many things did you buy?

Finn: Err, let me see, (*counting*) nine items.

Jean: OK, great, 好多超市都有快速付款台，专门方便给买了不超过十件东西的顾客使用。Look, it says: "10 items or less".

Finn: "10 items or less"?! Shouldn't that be...

Finn+Jean: Fewer?!

Finn: Hang on. Hey you, hey, do you work here?

Supermarket clerk: Good afternoon, sir.

Finn: Don't you realise your sign is grammatically wrong?

Supermarket

clerk: Oh, let me have a...

Finn: Well, it's not good enough. I suggest you check our website bbcukchina.com, and listen to this programme, and correct your mistake!

Jean: *(Whispering)* Finn, calm down, it's only grammar. Anyway, that's all for this week. 欢迎大家来我们的网站了解更多内容，有问题别忘了直接给我们发邮件过来，我们的邮箱地址是 questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk. Goodbye!

Finn: Bye!

Supermarket

clerk: But... you haven't paid... come back!