

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - June 21, 2015

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“I heard you made poor Sujatha cry. What did you do?”

“Nothing, actually. She asked me what I thought of her essay, and I gave her my honest opinion. I pointed out a few errors she’d made, and then went on to ...”

“Good grief! Don’t you know that Sujatha is too **thin-skinned** for all that?”

“Thin-skinned? Is it the opposite of thick-skinned?”

“Very good! A ‘thin-skinned’ person is someone who gets upset by what others say about him. He is easily hurt or offended by their comments.”

“In other words, he is hypersensitive. He breaks down or becomes very angry when people don’t have nice things to say about him.”

“That’s right! If you want to survive in politics, you cannot afford to be thin-skinned.”

“Nagesh is very thin-skinned. So, don’t make the mistake of making fun of him.”

“You, on the other hand, are very thick-skinned. You ...”

“Let’s not talk about me! Let’s talk about you, instead. How was your trip to Kolkata? Did you manage to see the places you’d planned to?”

“Didn’t get a chance to. I couldn’t even leave the hotel room because the three days I was there, it was **raining pitchforks**.”

“Raining pitchforks? Does it mean it was raining heavily?”

“That’s right! When you say it’s raining pitchforks, it means it’s pouring.”

“I see. So, can I say, every time we decide to go on a picnic, it rains pitchforks?”

“Sounds like a good example. Last Saturday, it rained pitchforks all day.”

“I know! It completely ruined my weekend. By the way, what is a pitchfork?”

“It’s a farm instrument. It looks like a fork with a long handle, and farmers use it to lift or move hay and grass. Tell me, how are your plans for the surprise party coming along?”

“The surprise party that I wanted to give my mother is no longer a surprise, I’m afraid. My sister told Kala about the plans, and ...”

“That was a big blunder. Doesn’t your sister know Kala has **foot-in-mouth disease**?”

“Foot-in-mouth disease? What kind of disease is that?”

“A person who has foot-in-mouth disease finds it difficult to keep a secret. He shares information with people he is not supposed to. He talks too much and ...”

“In other words, this person gets into trouble because of his big mouth. He talks about things he shouldn’t be.”

“I guess you could say that! He usually ends up saying the wrong things to wrong people at the wrong time. My friend Rahul has foot-in-mouth-disease.”

“Isn’t he the one who told the Principal about your plans to go on strike?”

“That’s right! The CEO doesn’t allow my boss to take part in any negotiation. She has foot-in-mouth disease. This expression has the same meaning as ‘to put one’s foot in one’s mouth.’”

“I see. How about this example? Hari put his foot in his mouth when he told his pregnant wife to lose some weight.”

“I’m sure that made her really angry. Last week at a party, I really put my foot in my mouth. I asked my boss if the man next to her was her husband. She said it was her father.”

“Such things shouldn’t worry you. After all, you’re pretty thick skinned.”

“I don’t think anybody should write his autobiography until after he’s dead.” – **Samuel Goldwyn**
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