**ER 4.5 *Forty-nine year***

We call nouns that do not have an *-s* in the plural, ‘zero plurals’. If you looked through the examples of zero plurals in the *Survey of English Dialects*’ thirteen samples of Somerset dialect (the county of Somerset is in the south west of England), you would find about fifteen examples. All of them, except for one, you would notice, are in phrases that contain a number: *seven ton, nine-year old, ten pound*. The one that doesn’t is also a statement about quantity, and contains the phrase *a lot* of instead of a number (*a lot of rush[es]*). All the examples are what are known as ‘measurement phrases’.

Measurement phrases used to be much more common in English, including StE. Shakespeare, for example, has dozens of them, like *six mile, ten year, twelve month.* The west country use of them is not slovenliness, but simply that the dialect has kept up a once normal practice.

In fact measurement phrases come from the Latin where the \*possessive case was used after a number. Latin *mille passuum* (‘a thousand paces’) is literally ‘a thousand of paces’ – *passuum* is the plural possessive form. You could say that *seven ton* means ‘seven of tons’, and *ten pound* means ‘ten of pounds’. This possessive case in measurement phrases came into OE, with ‘of tons’ and ‘of pounds’ being in the possessive plural case. In OE this ended in an *-a*, and in ME times, the *-a* was dropped, leaving the nouns without ending, including no -*s*. So the Somerset practice came from Latin, through OE. Not slovenly at all.