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Catherine: Hello, welcome to Question and Answer of the week! I'm Catherine and with me today is Feifei.

Feifei: 大家好, 欢迎收听《你问我答》。在这个节目中我们会解答大家在英语学习中遇到的难题。如果你在英语学习中遇到任何难题, 请把问题发送到我们的邮箱 questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk

Catherine: Today's question is from Erik in Taipei.

Feifei: 今天的问题来自台北的 Erik. 他想知道用英语谈论数字的时候, 什么时候该用复数, 什么时候又该用单数?

Question

Hi, I'm Erik from Taipei. I would like to know something about the authentic usage of plurality of numbers. Is it: minus two degree, or minus two degrees; two point two three yard, or two point two three yards? On blogs or microblogs, is it minus one character left, or minus one characters left? And do we say zero kilometre, or zero kilometres? Thank you!

Catherine: Wow – that's a lot of questions, Erik.

Feifei: Erik 的问题看上去很多, 但其实这些问题的语言点都是一样的。下面我们逐一解答。第一个问题是什么呢?

Catherine: Erik asked: is it minus two degree, or minus two degrees?

Feifei: 这个问题关于气温 temperature. 零下二度应该是 minus two degrees 还是 minus two degree?

Catherine: In this sentence, it's plural. We say: Minus two degrees.

Feifei: 单词温度 degree 是可数名词, 所以这里可以用它的复数形式 degrees. 下面一个问题, 应该说 two point two three yard 还是 two point two three yards?

Catherine: It's two point two three yards, with 's', yards – plural again. Have you worked out the rule yet?

Feifei: 一个数字修饰一个名词, 如果这个名词是可数的, 那么根据前面的数字大小, 这个名词可变成其复数形式。

Catherine: That's correct. Let's do some examples.

Feifei: OK – 15 米。

Catherine: Fifteen metres.

Feifei: 6.5 公里。

Catherine: Six point five kilogrammes.

Feifei: 7 分半。

Catherine: Seven and a half minutes.

Feifei: Seven and a half minutes. 那如果我们只想说半分钟，应该用单数还是复数呢？

Catherine: A half on its own isn't plural, so we say half a minute.

Feifei: 半分钟 half a minute 是单数。但半分钟前只要加上一个数字，单词分钟 minute 就变复数了。对吗？

Catherine: Right. Half a minute, two and a half minutes. What's the next question?

Feifei: 下面这个问题是关于发微博时的字数限制，我们应该说 minus one character left 还是 minus one characters left?

Catherine: Minus one character left. Single. 'One' is always single, even when it's minus one.

Feifei: 只要数字是一，不论是正一还是负一，都是单数。那数字零呢？是单数还是复数？

Catherine: We say zero kilometres. Zero seconds.

Feifei: 单词 zero 后的名词通常用复数。那 0.5 呢？

Catherine: Zero point five millimetres.

Feifei: 好了，我们来总结一下，如果一个可数名词前有零、零以上的数字，或是带小数点的数字等等，这个名词应该变成其复数形式。

Catherine: Yes. Zero kilometres, six minutes, two and a half years, minus eight point five degrees.

Feifei: 如果名词前的数字是 one 或 half, 这时应使用名词单数形式。

Catherine: Yes. One inch, half a metre.

Feifei: 好了，这期节目差不多该结束了。我们今天用了几分钟来回答 Erik 的问题呢？

Catherine: About four and a half minutes.

Feifei: 有空的时候欢迎大家到 BBC 英语教学的网站上收听更多的《你问我答》节目。谢谢收听，下次再会。

Catherine: Bye!