

‘quotation’

A personal phone call from Martin Harris, a typographically-alert reader in Tasmania, Australia, helped me decide that something had to be done about quotation marks. The letter about potato-crisp packets from Graham Brown of Norfolk in England (*ET* 16) pointed to the curious by-ways of quotation, and a letter from Dr Sheldon Wise of Rockville, Maryland (in this issue) reminded me that *ET* readers are missing out on a small corner of the diversity of the language. The last straw, however, was my own need to economize on editorial time and effort.

There have been many discussions in *ET* about the standardness of standard English. Although these have often included spelling, they have seldom spilled over into other aspects of orthography (a term that now relates to the technical aspects of writing and print but once meant simply ‘good writing’). Good writing varies, as do not-so-good writing and downright awful writing. And part of the variety – as our postbag testifies almost every day – is how people use quotation marks.

Among the lesser tasks of editing *ET* has been homogenizing the variety into a standard for our own purposes. This means, among other things, turning the conventional double commas of American usage into the single commas which are part of the house style of Cambridge University Press – but not, as many North Americans assume, the general style in Britain.

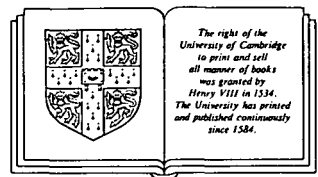
When planning *ET*, we decided to leave contributors’ spelling largely untouched and to honour the special grammatical and lexical usages of writers if they made it clear that such usages were important to them and to what they wished to say. I have also tried, whenever clarity was not at risk, to leave text alone, rather than magisterially fiddle with it.

The ‘experiment’ has now moved a stage further. I aim now to include both major varieties in punctuating quoted material, and judiciously to leave unadapted the more interesting idiosyncrasies – and invite comment whenever readers feel inclined to make it.

In this issue, Janet Swinney raises the question of linguistic domination of an ethnic and sexual nature. She focuses on Scotland, but the issue is wider than the United Kingdom. In addition, the grammarians reply to January’s letter from Tony Fairman. We would be glad to hear from readers on both subjects.

Tom McArthur

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the magazine itself is that of Cambridge University Press.



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