

## ISO 8601

From: Edward Eggertson,  
Burlington, Ontario, Canada

I'd like to comment on Jon G. Auerbach's article. "Today, 01-06-99" on the subject of all-numeric dating (*ET*63, *Usage 1*, pp. 29-30). The American format (m/d/y) has, unfortunately, been adopted to a large degree in Canada, in spite of its lack of logic. The "international" format (d/m/y) is more logical, but backward. It seems strange that the British use this format for dates, but once used £/s/d (not d/s/£) when counting out their money.

The ISO 8601 format (y/m/d) makes so much sense that it is surprising that any other format was ever even considered, by anyone. The fact that this format has the month before the day should appeal to "the American mind", since now all they have to do is to put the year first. I'm glad to report that this format is becoming fairly popular in Canada – but we've got a long way to go.

I'm surprised that "*English Today*" should have wasted two pages on this article. I suggest that you would have served your readers better with a two-page article on the logic and convenience of the ISO 8601 format.

Please excuse the diatribe – I look forward to each issue of *English Today*, and I treasure my complete set of issues, starting with *ET*1.

**Editor:** It is good to hear from you on this one. However, I disagree about the value of the Auerbach article, which I think says a great deal about US/UK contrasts and human conventions at large. We would, however, be glad to consider further material on this topic, including ISO 8601. My thanks and congratulations on having a full set of *ET*s. You belong to a select band around the world who have the full Monty – apart, of course, from libraries.

## Need a proof-reader?

From: Robert W. M. Greaves,  
Indonesia

[A composite of two e-mails]

On reading through *ET*63 (Jul 00), I find that not only has Jon G. Auerbach's article on writing dates in the United States been reprinted from *ET*62, but that the closing date for the crossword is wrong, or at least I hope it is, if I am to be able to enter the competition. I also notice that the footers differ with regard to the date of this issue. The large print footers give the date as October 2000, while the smaller ones which include the copyright notice give the date as July 2000.

In Jan Tent's article on English Lexicography in Fiji the Hindi *choro* is glossed in different places as *steel* and *steal*. Since we are told it is a verb, I assume the second one is what is meant, although I suppose the idea of steeling one-

self is possible, or could the English homophone be reflected in a Hindi homonym? *Pal* is glossed as "canvas sacks sown together". Should this not be *sewn*? I appreciate it is your policy to keep to contributors' own usage, but I strongly suspect Mr Tent would himself classify this as a typographical error.

All in all, it looks as if *ET* needs a proofreader. May I offer my services?

I have been a subscriber to *ET* since 1989 and as the quarters come round I've always found myself looking forward eagerly to its arrival. It's been interesting to see how it has changed over the years but still manages to strike a good balance between the scholarly and amateur (in the most positive senses of both). I'm particularly glad to see the letters section has returned.

I'm from the South East of England, but I have been living in Indonesia since 1987. Most of my

## A river and a friend

Languages are the oceans, the rivers, the lakes, the streams, the creeks, the springs on our earth. The differences among them are what make our life colourful. In essence, whatever forms they take, they are all water, they are not fire and water. Let's have tolerance over the changes, the developments, the existence of any single language and not let human imposition run in and assume sovereignty of any one language over the others. Let a language run its own course. Time will test and tell.

The ability to know a language other than one's own is an advantage, the possession of one shouldn't threaten the existence of the other. If the idea of treating English as a tool sounds too practical, we may take an idealistic view of com-

paring English to a friend of the Chinese language. We learn from each other. We tolerate each other's differences. We are also proud of having each other as a friend through whom we see more of the world. A world without friends is a lonely world. A world that we want our friends to be exactly like us or us to be exactly like our friends is a boring world. A world where friends turn into enemies is a cruel world. Let's learn English in the hope of achieving a better understanding and friendship throughout the world.

— Yang Ying: master's student in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and teacher of English at the South China University of Technology in Guangzhou: email, 13 April 00.

time here has been spent as an EFL teacher, but I am currently working in an Indonesian law firm where I do some teaching, but mainly act as a general resource for queries on English usage, proofread and edit correspondence and documents written in English and the firm's newsletter, translate from Bahasa Indonesia to English and check other people's translations from English to Bahasa Indonesia.

**Editor:** It is immensely valuable to have feedback of this kind. I plead guilty to all the charges, and know all too well that there is in cultural and professional terms no excuse for flaws in text (see the first article in this issue). When problems arise, I always debate with myself on how much public apologizing one should do.

*ET* has a limited budget and is understaffed. Currently three people bring it out: myself, our designer, and a single proof-reader. There are no prospects at present for an enlargement, and I miss my daughter Roshan's superb assistance in recent years; she has, however, rightly gone on to other things, having for years helped me after her mother's death in 1993.

Editing *ET* is a part-time activity that constantly seeks to be full-time. I can't however allow that to happen, because I have other calls, professional and personal, on my time, as have the designer and the proof-reader on theirs. So

we square the circle as best we can. Over the last year this has for several good reasons been particularly hard to do, but we have stuck to the cardinal rule: to bring *ET* out on schedule even if it means risking flaws. The alternative would be to run erratically late (like many journals) and throw a spanner in the works of CUP's printing division. *ET* has never been handed over late to CUP.

It is always a pleasure, whatever the reason, to hear from such readers as Edward Eggertson and Robert Greaves. Everything is grist to *ET*'s (not always perfect) mill. **But note:** Although everybody likes *Post & (E)Mail*, few contribute. I would be happy to build it up if more people sent in appropriate short items.

## Numbers and *and*

From: Dr Peter K W Tan,  
Senior Lecturer  
Dept of English Language and  
Literature  
National University of Singapore

I was fascinated with Göran Kjellmer's comment on *and* in numbers in *ET*64 (Oct 00). This brings to mind the preface to the New Revised Standard Version: Anglicized Edition (Oxford: OUP, 1995) of the Bible where the use of *-ize* is defended as British (and of course, it is also the Oxford, as opposed to the Cambridge, house

style). In addition, another change to the American NRSV is 'the insertion of "and" into numbers higher than one hundred' (p. xx), and this is the first change mentioned so that it gives the impression that this is the most significant difference between the American NRSV and the Anglicised NRSV!

I think we should see the position of *and* in the context of how numbers over a hundred are usually said or read.

The share market index of 4561 is typically read as 'forty-five sixty-one' (NOT 'forty-five hundred and sixty-one' or 'four thousand, five hundred and sixty-one') whether in North America, in the British Isles, in Australia or in Singapore. If you paid £250 or \$250 for a sofa, you'd tell your friend you paid 'two fifty' for it. And of course, if you paid £2.50 or \$2.50 for a magazine, you'd also typically tell your friend you paid 'two fifty' (rather than 'two pounds/dollars and fifty pence/cents') for it. (However, in pre-decimalised Britain or Ireland or Australia, if you paid 2/6 for a magazine, you might say you paid 'two and six' for it.)

What I'm saying is that *hundred* is often elided in speech. When this happens, *and* disappears as well. Is it any surprise that the *and* might also not be inserted when *hundred* is put in?

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## SNIPPETS 6

### Girls head out in front

(From *South China Morning Post (Education)*, Sat 2 Dec 00,  
Polly Hui, Hong Kong)

A glaring gender gap in schools has been highlighted by recently published figures of exam results, which show that more girls are sitting Hong Kong A-levels and Certificate of Education exams than boys, and that girls are dramatically outperforming boys in both English and Chinese. The number of women admitted to Hong Kong's top universities is also outstripping the number of men.

CROSSWORD

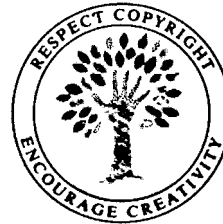
ET64 Crossword solution

1	S	T	I	C	K		4	E	N	I	G	M	A	T	I	6	
	H		R		N			N		N		A		O		8	
9	A	L	I	B	I		10	D	I	S	O	R	I	E	N	T	
	D		D		G			A		T		E		N		T	
11	E	V	E	N	H	A	N	D	E	D		12	F	A	L	L	
			A		T			G		P		13	D		I		E
14	F	I	L	T	H	I	E	R		15	B	E	D	L	A	M	
	E				O			R		16	D						A
17	R	A	18	T	I	O	N		19	O	E	D	I	P	E	A	N
	O		O		D		21	B		S		G		P			
22	C	L	U	B		23	D	I	S	P	E	R	S	I	O	24	N
	I		R		25	J		K		O			A		G		I
26	O	X	I	D	A	T	I	O	N		27	T	H	O	N	G	
	U		S		R			N		D		E		N			H
28	S	A	T	I	S	F	I	E	S		29	S	H	I	F	T	

ET63 Crossword winners

The winners of *Words on Words. Quotations about Language and Languages*, David and Hilary Crystal, Penguin, the prize for our July 2000 crossword, are:

- J. Buxton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England
- Stephen Coffey, Pistoia, Italy
- John Edwards, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
- Norman Grosblatt, Chevy Chase, Maryland, USA
- Michael B. Rutman, Pfaffikon, Switzerland



SNIPPETS 5

On 7 Nov 99, 188 member states attending the UNESCO General Conference in Paris unanimously adopted a resolution which declared 21 February International Mother Language Day.