

TechNews

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SUBMISSIONS

TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59PM on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsit.com.

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Letters to the editor may be submitted by anyone, but are subject to review by the editor-in-chief. All letters-to-the-editor become the property of TechNews upon submission. TechNews does not accept or publish anonymous letters.

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Ethiopian Expedition:

Getting there is half the battle

By Sebastian Morales Prado
TECHNEWS WRITER

After what has definitely been the longest and most stressful trip in my short but very appreciated life, I finally find myself in the crib of human existence. Where the time is weird, the calendar is weird, the language is weirder, and for the first time, there is not a trace of Mexican culture anywhere I look: Mother Ethiopia!

But first, let's go a back in time, just enough to see myself missing my plane in that beautiful city with horrible weather; London. If there was any doubt that I was about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime, it was destroyed when I realized I had just under three hours to change airports and make my connection flight to Egypt. All hope to make the connection disappeared with my luggage, and when the luggage finally appeared, that three hour connection had transformed into an hour-and-a-half-long sign of desperation. Luckily for me, a Dutch woman was in the same - and with 'same' I mean similar - but much better situation. We decided to share a taxi to our connection airport and subsequently save 49 pounds.

Remember the movie "Snatch" and their description of London? "London. You know: fish, chips, cup 'o tea, bad food, worse weather, Mary Poppins. LONDON." Well, they forgot to mention the really annoying traffic when you are in a hurry trying to reach Heathrow airport from Gatwick airport to catch

your flight to Cairo.

Upon arriving at Heathrow, I heard the announcement, "next plane leaves at two," which meant I had a couple of hours to relax. And by relax, I mean stress out and make sure I got a seat in that plane. Hours passed, and the only seat it seemed I would be sitting on was my luggage. Managers spoke to managers, who then spoke to more managers. My hopes of getting to Ethiopia on time were still high, but only in the sense that I have high hopes that one morning I will wake up understanding every language.

"Give us 75£ and we'll get you in the next flight," might not sound like a great deal, but considering that they were asking for almost one eye (in pounds), I found myself running through the airport trying to change all my dollars into pounds just to get onto the plane that would let me see the Great Pyramids from the sky. With empty pockets, but a full smile, I was now running towards gate E-40, which obviously happened to be the last one in the terminal.

Without wondering too much about how the people helping me at the airline's desk had teleported to the gate, I decided to make myself comfortable in my new seat on the airplane, sleep, and maybe wake up for dinner. And what a dinner! Just when I was convinced that no one could make carrot cake like my mother, they put a layer of white chocolate on top. Barriga llena, corazón contento (full stomach, happy heart)... and back to sleep.

I awoke as whispers turned into mumbles,

which then turned into shouts of excitement. Through the window, right under our wing, shining on top of what appeared to be an infinitely dark sea of oil, we saw the Great Pyramids of Giza!

More than 36 hours had passed since I was first riding on the Blue Line to O'Hare. My coat was now gone, but my excitement was still very present. I was finally in Addis Ababa, except for the 20 dollars that kept me locked away from freedom. I needed to get my visa, and with the ATM not working, I couldn't get it. Lucky for me, the money exchange in the airport was still open. But, my story couldn't finish so easily: after converting all the currency that I managed to dig out of my pockets and harassing my fellow passengers, I ended up getting only 17 dollars, 13 birr and 100 pesos. Thank God this is Africa, though. I was able to skip immigration, go out of the airport, meet my dear friend Eyu, get some extra cash from home, go back into the airport, pay my fees, get a my visa sticker on my passport, and finally walk out of the airport with my luggage. I felt, as I imagine an ex-prisoner would, finally walking out of the gates of hell towards a new life of freedom and wealth. Well, maybe I exaggerated a bit with that last description, but I hope to never find out (unless of course for some reason I end up in prison).

This is the first of three installments covering Sebastian's summer trip to Ethiopia. Do you have something similar to share or an opinion to declare? Email opinion@technewsit.com for more information.

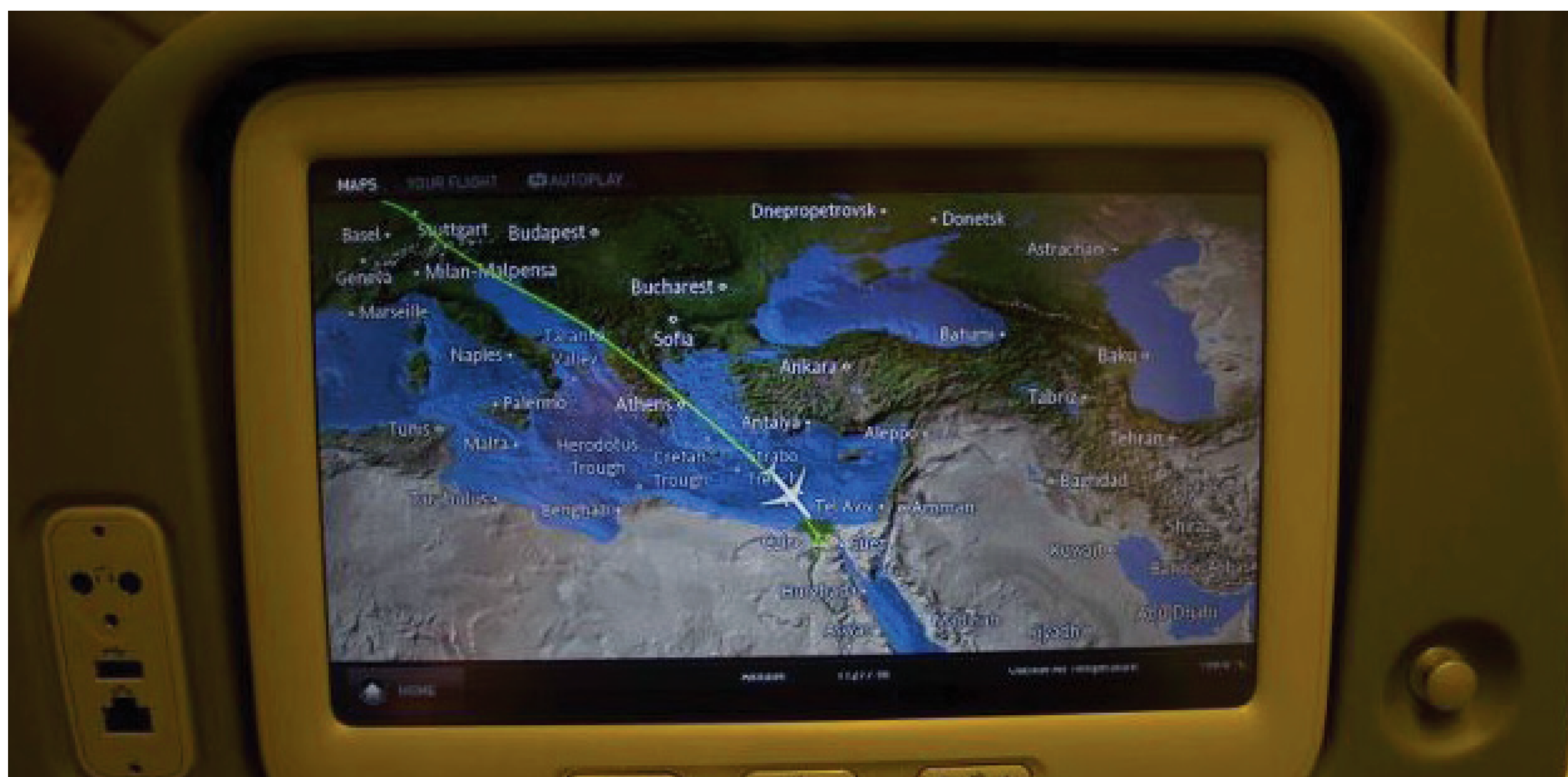


Photo by Sebastian Morales Prado

Informal, proper use of language, punctuation changing

By Chris Roberts
COPY & LAYOUT EDITOR

I came across a comment a few days ago which has left me troubled: "Email in my opinion is not electronic mail, despite its etymology; it is just that: email." Statements like that make me question why I bothered to become literate.

First off, there is the missing hyphen in "email," but I will get to that later.

Secondly, how could someone have the fluency in English needed to construct that sentence while at the same time specifically believe that "email" has no relation to what it actually is?

If "email" is not electronic mail, can anyone tell me what it is?

The more significant issue here is the popularity of spelling e-mail as "email." Try to pronounce "email" as it is written here. Personally, I end up with something that sounds like "em-ale."

Incidentally, did you notice the hyphen that I used there, to convey that the two parts are intended to be pronounced individually? Written language has mechanics which convey to readers how the text is supposed to be interpreted, since the author is

not present to clarify what was or was not meant.

Some people object to such precision use of language with the fact that language usage changes over time, as though that, in and of itself, counters any criticism that could ever be made.

Despite how pedantic this article may come across as, this is not an objection to two words being fused into one word. For starters, "e" is not a word; it is a representation of the word "electronic" that has been shortened through the use of a hyphen. If people want to make e-mail one hyphenless word, it would be electronicmail. This is about acknowledging that written language has mechanics for a reason.

Commas differ from semi-colons; exclamation points are not the same as periods—although, judging from some Internet posts, maybe that idea has not gotten around yet.

I would not be so bothered by this informal alteration/misuse of a term if said misuse was not being considered correct. People frequently misspell words, but no one concludes that since an error is happening often that the error must be correct.

However, as you will see in this publication, "email" is used constantly. This is not because copy editors are slacking on the job. It is because the stylebook of the Associated

Press, adhered to be nearly all newspapers, changed its formal standards to accommodate spelling e-mail as "email." This change is not because electronic mail somehow mutated between printings of the stylebook. It is because of the sheer, overwhelming use of "email" in online writing. There have been pages calling for the stylebook to change its logical and fully justified use of e-mail in favor "email," what is essentially a popular typo in my opinion, "like a normal person."

This sort of argument never happens in other intellectual systems. Math professors do not read errors in equations and change textbooks to redefine the errors as formal proofs because they are close enough.

At what point did formal use of language, much less a single keystroke, become such an intolerable mental hurdle that the very meaning of a term can be completely disregarded?

Until humans develop telepathy, can we at least humor the idea that language needs consistent rules and mechanics in order to be used effectively, especially in an increasingly diverse society in which common ground, unspoken cues, and other informal tools cannot be relied upon?

Then again, maybe it's just me...