

Is the Trend of Using Apostrophe's to Form the Plural's of Noun's in English of Concern to Professor's of Writing?

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ABSTRACT

Using an apostrophe to form the plural of a noun in American English, according to traditional rules of grammar, is normally incorrect. Nonetheless, over the past few decades, it has become popular to do so, particularly in writing that is intended to be read by the public, such as signage and advertisements (e.g., "Appetizer's"). This usage is also becoming common among student writers in academic contexts, partially because of the broad influence of the public usage error, and partially because so little traditional grammar is taught in most American high schools. Consequently, the addition of apostrophes where they do not belong in standard written English is widespread and is an example of modern language orthography in rapid evolution. Coupled with a simultaneous trend to eliminate apostrophes where standard English demands them, the misuse of an apostrophe to form plurals has become an "issue" in classrooms such as mine (i.e., in legal writing courses for American law students), where we are training students to perform in a professional field where tradition dies hard. My presentation will quickly review the rules of pluralization of nouns in English, will provide many examples of the trends to eliminate or add apostrophes incorrectly in different contexts, and will discuss whether professors of writing in English - whether teaching native speakers or ESL students - should "rally" to prevent the trend from progressing further or whether this evolution is harmless and should be allowed to run its course, even in highly traditional professional contexts.