

# There's no need to apologise - what you say is quite OK

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My fellow EDP columnist Lynne Mortimer has ventured into the realms of grammar recently.

In an amusing column, she has written about bad manners, as well as about what she calls "sloppy grammar".

Her column is, as always, entertaining, but for me it's a pity that she includes these two different topics in a way which suggests they are all of a piece.

She agrees with a correspondent - as we surely all do - that blowing your nose at a concert in Norwich Cathedral and then publicly examining the contents of your handkerchief is bad manners.

But then Lynne also seems to be suggesting that having written in her column "I was sat" rather than "I was sitting" is an act of similar moral turpitude.

She certainly feels that it is something she ought to apologise for - and she has actually done so.

I feel rather sad about this. There is nothing at all wrong with saying "I was sat".

So I regret that Lynne feels she also has to explain this "lapse" of hers by saying that it results from "the grammatical uncertainty that arises from being local".

I would have thought that being local, in our area, is something to very pleased



■ Were they sat, or were they sitting? It doesn't really matter, says Peter Trudgill.

about. And, if you are pleased about that, then why not write in a local way, in our local newspaper, without feeling you need to apologise?

Interestingly, though, "I was sat" does not strike me as being a very local usage anyway.

It is something which people in the south-east of England and East Anglia have only started saying recently, if at all.

The first person I ever heard saying it, about 40 years ago, came from Bristol.

And the other people who I heard using this construction in those days came from

parts of the Midlands and the North.

What has happened is what often occurs - a linguistic form has spread from one part of our country to another. The usage is new here and, as is often the case with innovations in language, if people notice them, they tend not to like them.

Some complainers reckon that "I was stood on the corner" is wrong because no one has stood you there.

But it's no different from saying "he was crouched in a corner" or "I was stretched on the sofa". No one had stretched you there - you did it all by yourself.