

Re: was did

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2008-09/msg00518.html>

- *From:* "benlizro@xxxxxxxxxx" <benlizro@xxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Thu, 18 Sep 2008 13:45:38 -0700 (PDT)
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On Sep 18, 11:19 pm, "Peter T. Daniels" <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Sep 18, 2:18 am, John Swindle <jcswin...@xxxxxxx> wrote:

On Wed, 17 Sep 2008 13:28:52 -0700 (PDT), "Peter T. Daniels" <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Sep 17, 2:39 pm, John Swindle <jcswin...@xxxxxxx> wrote:

On Wed, 17 Sep 2008 05:32:12 -0700 (PDT), "Peter T. Daniels" <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Sep 17, 1:17 am, John Swindle <jcswin...@xxxxxxx> wrote:

...
I grew up in
North
America
and still live
in the
United
States
(although
not in North
America),
and I can
tell you how
to construct
those, or
how I do it
anyway.

Re: was did

Write an
e-mail
message.
Use a
"was"
construction.
Go back
and change
it to a "did"
construction,
but
forget to
delete the
"was." Et
voila. (Ett
VOY-la.) I
can't
imagine
that those
are anything
but typos.
—

Did you "grow up in NA"
before 1980?

You claim to live in Hawai`i
and that the construction is
not used
there?

Right on both counts! So far as I know.

It's hard to say that a construction is not
used, but "was did" is
certainly unfamiliar. I suspect that the
examples represent careless
writing or editing and that the writers would
not use it in their own
speech.

Re: was did

You have however heard it widely, and if others have heard it too then I'm obviously mistaken.

Have others heard it too?

The linguists who wrote the AmSp article that analys... found certainly have ...

(is is, not was did)

Sure. But "was did" is something else: a typo.

Of course "was did" could work just fine in a context like "Only when he looked back and saw who it was did he abandon the idea of singing 'The Internationale' at her wedding."–

Of course it's not a typo, or there wouldn't be so many examples so easily findable.

I'm not sure I follow this argument. Google mines an enormous corpus, and you can find numerous examples of all kinds of things that clearly are errors. I'm not sure I'd use "typo" here, which to me suggests single-character errors (extra letter, wrong letter, missing letter). Rather, it's quite similar to self-corrections that happen all the time in spontaneous speech. You start off framing a question with "was", then decide that it would work better with "did", and out comes:

"What was/ did people do for fun in the 1930s?"

Normally these are eliminated in edited versions of spoken text (except by linguists of course). But maybe people posting to internet sites are sometimes a bit careless and both auxiliaries get left in. This is why I am asking whether these are errors or a genuinely novel syntactic structure. Spoken examples would probably give an intonational clue. If it's as common as you say on radio, maybe Ron Hardin could find us one?

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And you have no idea how many more examples there are

with any other verb and any other sequence of auxiliaries.

Indeed. I got tired of looking.

And the set of examples included no examples of "who it was did he"
literary-style inversions.

Sure. I was looking for examples where the two would have to be part
of the same clause.

Ross Clark

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