

## The long and short of it



No Czech would criticize a politician's wife for referring to her husband's love child as an "it." In the U.S., Elizabeth Edwards is getting grief from the language nazis for doing so, even though she was in fact the victim of her husband's dalliance with a hot young thing. If Edwards were speaking Czech, she'd be spared the linguistic execution. In Czech, child (dítě) is neuter and is always an "it." For some grammarians, the English "child" is also neuter (from Old English, by way of the German "Kind"), but try telling that to the analysts on CNN! Czechs don't know how lucky they are to have a language with grammatical gender. The loss of it in English after the Norman Conquest is one reason for the battle of the sexes. There's been a search since 1795 for a gender-neutral pronoun, but the best one for combining she, he and it - shit - is already taken and would have gotten Edwards into even more trouble.

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