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UNIX & LINUX

Single quote within double quotes and the Bash reference manual

In section 3.1.2.3 titled Double Quotes, the Bash manual says:

-  15 Enclosing characters in double quotes ("") preserves the literal value of all characters within the quotes, with the exception of '\$', '\', and, when history expansion is enabled, '!'.

- At the moment I am concerned with the single quote(').
- It's special meaning, described in the preceding section, section 3.1.2.2 is:
 8 Enclosing characters in single quotes (') preserves the literal value of each character within the quotes. A single quote may not occur between single quotes, even when preceded by a backslash

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```
echo "'$a'"
```

where variable `a` is not defined (hence `$a` = null string), should print `$a` on the screen, as `' '`, having it's special meaning inside, would shield `$` from the special interpretation. Instead, it prints `' '`. Why so?

bash

shell

quoting

edited Feb 9 '17 at 0:13



codeforester

417 4 18

asked Nov 23 '14 at 10:20



Lavya

514 4 9 23

2 Answers



21



The `'` single quote character in your `echo` example gets it literal value (and loses its meaning) as it enclosed in double quotes (`"`). The enclosing characters are the double quotes.

What you can do is print the single quotes separately:

```
echo "'''$a''"
```

or escape the `$` :

```
echo "'\$a'"
```

edited Nov 23 '14 at 11:20



terdon ♦

137k 33 283 459

answered Nov 23 '14 at 10:40



Anthon

62.9k 17 111 176

Oh you are totally right! The output is consistent with your answer but my doubt was with the line "Enclosing characters in double quotes (`"`) preserves the literal value of all characters within the quotes, with the exception of `'`, `'`, `'`, and, when history expansion is enabled, `!`." in the Bash reference manual. It seems that the single quote character is not escaped within double quotes. The expected behavior is that the single quote character is escaped within double quotes.

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You misunderstand the documentation:

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having it's special meaning inside, would shield \$ from the special interpretation



"Having its special meaning" means that it **is** interpreted specially not literally. Single quotes prevent \$ from being expanded. But single quotes within double quotes are literal characters i.e. they do not affect anything. If you want the output \$a then you need `echo '$a'`.

answered Nov 23 '14 at 10:48



[Hauke Laging](#)

58.9k

12

93

138

you are right. I not only misunderstood the document, I misread it (taling "" for ""!). you're right about "single quotes within double quotes are literal characters ". Thanks! – [Lavya](#) Nov 23 '14 at 11:01

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