

Linguistics 30Q. 4/15/05.

So far, we've looked at two "rules" that concern the choice of syntactic construction, both of them apparently the invention of commentators on grammar and usage who chose to criticize constructions that had been generally available in the language for hundreds of years (and continue to be used by good writers today and are sometimes to be preferred to the alternatives): stranded prepositions and split infinitives. Next week we turn to another of these odd invented "rules", the Possessive Antecedent Proscription (PAP). This one doesn't concern the wholesale (un)acceptability of a construction, so it's a bit more subtle than No Stranded Prepositions and No Split Infinitives. What's at issue is a linkage between a pronoun and another NP, to which the pronoun "refers".

There are certainly some restrictions on which of these linkages are possible. In

(1) Mary thinks that she is a genius.

the pronoun *she* can be linked to the NP *Mary* (or it can pick out some female person other than Mary), but in

(2) She thinks that Mary is a genius.

this linkage isn't possible. The problem with (2) isn't that pronouns can't be linked to NPs that follow them, since things like

(3) The fact that she can solve differential equations in her head makes Mary a genius. are fine. (Manuals don't tell you not to write things like (2), with a linkage between *she* and *Mary*, because nobody is inclined to!) In any case, the PAP is a proposed restriction on such linkages.

1. For M 18 April and W 20 April: Read the MWDEU entries on **pronoun with possessive antecedent**; **pronoun**, section 2; **agreement**; and **this**, section 1. Also read the handout from my 1/6/05 paper for the American Dialect Society; I'm giving this out in hard copy today, but it's also available through my website.

Be prepared to have a group discussion about terms like *pronoun* and *antecedent* and *refer* and *possessive* and how they figure in statements of the PAP. Think of it this way: suppose you are asked to teach the PAP to a bunch of high school students who are preparing for the PSAT; it's in their textbook. How do you do it? What examples do you use, and what do you say about them? What alternatives do you offer to the "incorrect" pronoun uses? If the students don't understand what's "wrong" with the examples you give them, what do you say to them?

2. For F 22 April, to turn in as written homework: Collect examples, as many as you can, of apparent violations of the PAP. Write a brief but coherent essay explaining why your examples might count as violations, including some discussion of cases you're unsure about, and what makes you unsure.

Also collect at least ten examples (not involving the PAP) where you see some problem in linking pronouns successfully to NPs, or simply in figuring out what pronouns refer to. In a brief essay, explain what the problems are and say how they might be fixed, by rewording or by supplying more context.