

Can You Correct 'Her and I?'

On March 5, Jazmine Hughes wrote in a New York Times blog,

"Recently, at an IRL party — that is, a party that takes place 'in real life,' as opposed to where I generally live, which is on the Internet — a guest asked a friend and I how we met."

The sentence includes a common **error** I have been seeing and hearing more and more often lately.

The error is using the subject pronoun "I" when the object pronoun "me" should be used.

Even President Obama can be heard using "I" for the object of a sentence. At his first press conference, on November 7, 2008, he spoke about being invited to tour the White House. "Well, President Bush graciously invited Michelle and I to -- to meet with him and First Lady Laura Bush."

The rule for object pronouns

English has eight subject pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, you and they. Subject pronouns show the actor in a sentence. For example, in the sentence "I speak English," "I" is the actor.

English also has eight object pronouns: me, you, him, her, it, us, you and them. We use an object pronoun to show the receiver of the action in a sentence, as in "She gave the book to me." In that sentence, "me" is the receiver.



Everyday Grammar for Object Pronouns piece

People often confuse subject pronouns and object pronouns in sentences with two receivers.

Take the sentence "President Obama gave an award to my brother and me." We can easily see the need for an object pronoun because of the preposition "to."

But some sentences do not have prepositions, as in "Obama asked my brother and me some questions." The sentence still needs the object pronoun "me."

However, some people might want to say "Obama asked my brother and I some questions." You know that sentence has a grammar error because "I" is not an object pronoun.

Why people say "I" instead of "me"

I think the confusion about "I" and "me" comes from **instruction** we get as children: to be polite. When we mention ourselves and another person in a sentence, we are told to put the other person first.

For example, we might be reminded to say, "My brother and I went to the White House." Saying "I and my brother went to the White House" is grammatically correct but would sound impolite, or rude.

So, English speakers who are faced with two people in the object position in a sentence often grab for the phrase "somebody and I." They do not notice the phrase is grammatically incorrect. It just sounds more polite.

Another theory about the "I" or "me" error comes from a 2009 New York Times article "[The I's Have It.](#)"

Writers Patricia T. O'Conner and Stewart Kellerman guess that people correct children who use "me" instead of "I" so much, the children grow up using "I" even when it is wrong. They explain the term for this linguistic **phenomenon** is "**hypercorrection**."

Back to Ms. Hughes, her party and the New York Times blog. Her sentence should be re-written as "...a guest asked a friend and me how we met." Shortly after I called the error to the newspaper's attention, the sentence was corrected.

A simple way to check for the correct pronoun in a case like this is mentally to eliminate the second person. Try saying in your head "A guest asked me how we met," or, "A guest asked a friend how we met." That simple check makes choosing the correct pronoun easier.

Now you will always know the right pronoun to use – take it from *me*!

I'm Jill Robbins.

Dr. Jill Robbins wrote this story for VOA Learning English. Kelly Jean Kelly was the editor.

Words in This Story

error - *n.* something that is not correct; a wrong action or statement; mistake

instruction - *n.* the action or process of teaching : the act of instructing someone

phenomenon - *n.* something (such as an interesting fact or event) that can be observed and studied and that typically is unusual or difficult to understand or explain fully

hypercorrection – *n.* the mistaken use of a word form or pronunciation based on a false analogy with a correct or prestigious form?

Now it's your turn. In the comments section, tell us about your own grammar gripes. What do people say in your language that bothers you?