



Between You and Me

Today I'm going to talk about the pronouns I and me. Celine Dion gets it right. Jessica Simpson does not.

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Just between you and me, today I'm going to talk about the pronouns *I* and *me*. I've been meaning to talk about these pronouns for a while, but when I heard that Hillary Clinton had chosen the song "You and I" by Celine Dion for her campaign theme song, I knew it was finally the right time to tackle this topic!

That's because Celine Dion's song "You and I" is grammatically correct, whereas the Jessica Simpson song "Between You and I" is incorrect.

You, I, and Me Are Pronouns

First the basics: The words *you*, *I*, and *me* are all pronouns. They stand in for nouns like *Hillary*, *Jessica*, and *Grammar Girl*.

Pronouns can be subjects, objects, or possessive. I've talked about this before—the subject of a sentence is the agent taking action, and the object is the thing or person being acted upon. If I say, "I love you," I am the subject (the one doing the loving), and you are the object (the target of my love and the object of my affection).

A possessive pronoun shows that the thing or person possesses something. I won't talk about possessive pronouns anymore today, because they aren't relevant to the topic.

Subject and Object Pronouns

This next part you just kind of have to know. If you've been speaking English for a long time, you probably know it whether you think you do or not, and if you are learning English you just have to memorize it.

I is a [subject pronoun](#), and *me* is an [object pronoun](#).

The proper sentence is *I love you*, not *Me love you*. You use *I* because the pronoun is the subject of the sentence, and *I* is the subject pronoun. And if you've been speaking English your whole life, your ear quickly picks up the difference between right and wrong. *I play the marimbas* versus *Me play the marimbas*.

Squiggly loves me is the proper sentence, not *Squiggly loves I*. I'm the target of Squiggly's love, so *I* is in the object position in that sentence, and the objective pronoun is *me*. Again, in most cases your ear should pick up the difference. *He gave the marimbas to me* versus *He gave the marimbas to I*.

The reason it gets a little tricky when you combine *I* and *me* with *you* is that *you* is both a subject and an object pronoun. It's one of those confusing things that just isn't fair. Whether *you* is in the subject or the object position, you still use the word *you*. *You love Squiggly*, and *Squiggly loves you*. They are both correct.

You and I Versus You and Me

Here's why the song title "You and I" is correct: The title comes from the line "You and I were meant to fly." In that line, *you* and *I* are both in the subject case. We're taking action—flying.

That seems pretty straightforward. So now we can move on to "Between You and I" and figure out why it's wrong.

Between is a [preposition](#), just as *on*, *above*, *over*, and *of* are prepositions. Because prepositions usually either describe a relationship, or show possession, they don't act alone; they often answer [questions](#) like *Where?* and *When?* For example, if I said, "Keep that secret between you and me," *between* describes where the secret is to be kept. If I said, "I'll tell you the secret on July 5," *on* describes when the secret will be revealed.

So, instead of acting alone, prepositions are part of prepositional phrases. In those example sentences, *between you and me* and *on July 5* are prepositional phrases. **And it's just a rule that pronouns following prepositions in those phrases are always in the objective case** (1). When you're using the objective case, the correct pronoun is *me*, so the correct prepositional phrase is *between you and me*.

Most grammarians are sympathetic to people who say *between you and I* because it's considered a hypercorrection. The theory is that people have been so traumatized by being corrected when they say things such as *Ashley and me went to the mall* instead of *Ashley and I went to the mall* that they incorrectly correct *between you and me* to *between you and I* (2, 3, 4). I don't have anything against Jessica Simpson. I know I indirectly picked on her [last week](#) too because she was in the video I posted on the blog showing George Bush saying, "nuclear power pants." But if remembering that her song "Between You and I" is wrong helps you remember the rule, then she's done a service to the world.

References

- (1) Strumpf, M. and Douglas, A. *The Grammar Bible*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004, p. 208.
- (2) Garner, B. A. *Garner's Modern American Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 100.
- (3) HiDuke, J. "Frequently Asked Questions." *Dr. Grammar Website*. 2001, www.drgrammar.org/faqs/ (accessed June 25, 2007).
- (4) Brians, P. "I/You/Me." *Common Errors in English*. wsu.edu/~brians/errors/myself.html (accessed June 25, 2007).