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Eliminating Outdated Grammar Myths for ESL and EFL Instructors and Students

Mun Koo Kang
Kongju National University

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The purpose of this article is to examine several outdated grammar myths and illustrate why, in the interest of furthering English education around the world, they should be set aside by progressive-minded EFL and ESL teachers and students. All current and future English speakers need to learn and understand the rules of grammar in order to fully master the language. However, many guidelines that are believed to be English grammar rules are actually myths that have lingered in the lexicon for decades or centuries. They carry with them confusion and misunderstanding, often standing in the way of second language learners and teachers. These troublesome myths must be identified and set aside for the good of students and teachers of English. Therefore, this study examined some current grammar myths and identified why they should be eliminated. Because of the scope of one study, a limited number of myths and issues were addressed. Further study on the topic should be performed.

[English education /English Grammar rules/current grammar myths/ outdated grammar myths/영어교육/영어문법규칙/현행문법통념/과거문법통념]

I. INTRODUCTION

Native English speakers traditionally learn grammar as a series of tedious rules and regulations, each with seemingly innumerable exceptions. This education begins in elementary school, but evolves into more structured lessons as children move into secondary school. Generally, grammar rules are presented to students by the older members of the middle or high school teaching staff. As years go by, the men and women who inherit these challenging classes often find it difficult to push them off on younger and more energetic staff members simply because the newer teachers are either unwilling to

take them on or they seriously lack the depth of understanding necessary to explain the complex grammar regulations and exceptions to the uninitiated (Won-Bo Kim, 2011; Hee-Jae Shin, 2011).

As a result, older grammar teachers have a broader influence on the student population. When they eventually retire, schools will scramble to find suitable replacements from the faculty members. A likely candidate is someone who had one of these strict grammarians in high school or university. Therefore, it is said that they echo the same rules and regulations, clinging to the myths and legends of the past, and today's students are once again exposed to concepts and ideas that literally came from two, three, or even four generations ago.

This scenario has been played out in the American school system for decades, and the result is a mixture of antiquated grammar myths juxtaposed with an ever-evolving English language. Teenagers contribute a multitude of new and interesting terms to the vernacular annually while the grammar elders try in vain to impede this language progress by holding fast to the strict rules of yesteryear.

In terms of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, this ongoing conflict has created some very mixed messages about grammar rules. Some of the more stubborn grammar "myths" that have lingered in Western classrooms for much of the past century are of little use to speakers and writers of English in the present day. These outdated and potentially confusing myths need to be identified and set aside so that they do not interfere with EFL and ESL students as they continue to gather an understanding of the English language.

It is important to note that while grammar is derived from a plethora of hard and fast rules, it is also true that—especially when writing in English—there are hundreds, even thousands, of issues that are dictated by style. Writers often follow a listing of style guidelines, aptly called a style guide.

A style guide is a document that is typically put together by editors, managers, or producers of written works to define how they want their writers to handle all of the unresolved problems that arise. It can include almost anything the creator of such a guide wants it to, but it typically covers things like grammar issues, spelling issues, formatting issues, and general writing recommendations.

A grammar issue might be whether to capitalize the first letter of a full sentence after a colon. A spelling issue might be whether to use the American or British spelling of a word. A formatting issue might be what font to use for a specific section of the document, like bold, italic, or underlined. A general writing recommendation might be whether some type of jargon is allowed.

On issues of style, editors and teachers are free to follow any one of a number of accepted principles. However, grammar should be a different situation entirely. Teachers in

one region, country, or continent should not be pushing students toward one grammatical extreme or another. A unified set of grammar rules—free from outdated myths—will hopefully create a standard for written and spoken English that is clear, concise, and easily understood by everyone.

II. DISCUSSION

There is general confusion in Western cultures about the use of standard and nonstandard English, especially among those who think that any word that is uttered aloud or finds its way into the dictionary is worthy of use in nearly every situation. Of course, nonstandard English words, slang, jargon, and other questionable terminology should rarely be employed in written form, especially for business use.

1. Dictionary Words

School children will defend the use of any dictionary word—for example, the contraction *ain't*—in their written schoolwork. Teachers are quick to restrict nonstandard English, and the argument often becomes one based on whether the term in question is actually an English word. Some teachers refuse to acknowledge words like *ain't*, going so far as to claim that they are not words and should never, ever be used. Students run to the dictionary, correctly observing that *ain't* is, in fact, listed there and that it is, in fact, a word.

Students need to learn and understand the difference between standard and nonstandard words. For example, some people mistakenly use the term *irregardless* when they mean *regardless*. The word *regardless* means *in less regard*, *without regard*, or *despite something*. The prefix *ir-* is a negative prefix, so when it is added to a word that is already negative like *regardless*, it becomes a double-negative word that literally means "*without without regard*."[1]

Language experts speculate that *irregardless* comes from a combination of the words *regardless* and *irrespective* and that another reason people might say *irregardless* is that they are following the pattern of words like *irregular* and *irreplaceable*. However, the difference is that *regardless* already has the *-less* suffix on the end, so it is not like those other words.

While the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* all list the word *irregardless*, they also note that it is

[1] 'Dictionary' was partly referred to http://tipidpchosting.com/viewtopic.php?tid=10075

considered nonstandard. Listing a word as nonstandard is a way that dictionaries concede that a word is in common use, but is not really a proper word.

Standard language is defined as the language spoken by educated native speakers (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011) but comprehensive dictionaries also include nonstandard words, dialect, colloquialisms, and jargon--words like *ain't*, *conversate*, and *irregardless*. It would certainly call into question the education level if a person said or wrote things like, *"I ain't gonna conversate with him irregardless of the consequences."*

Sometimes words make the transition from nonstandard to standard English, such as the word *snuck.* But since many educated people still rail against *irregardless* and the word is not commonly seen in edited writing, it is highly unlikely that it will make the transition to standard language any time soon.

And one additional thought about dictionaries—sometimes words will show up in one dictionary and not another, and it is important to realize that there are different kinds of dictionaries. For example, there are *prescriptive* and *descriptive* dictionaries. A prescriptive dictionary focuses on the way the language should be according to traditional rules. Conversely, a descriptive dictionary focuses on the language that is actually in use by the population. Therefore, a descriptive dictionary is likely to include words that a prescriptive dictionary would leave out. Many older dictionaries are prescriptive, but most modern dictionaries are descriptive. Some people think the *American Heritage Dictionary* is the most prescriptive modern dictionary (Amazon Editorial Review, 2011). It still includes nonstandard words like *irregardless*, but it seems to make stronger statements against them than other dictionaries.

2. Beginning a Sentence with a Conjunction

It has long been preached by strict grammarians that it is wrong to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so*.) Teachers will typically say this because they are trying to help students avoid writing fragments. Other times teachers give this advice because their preference is that a sentence not begins with a coordinating conjunction. It is important to note that no grammar rule is broken if a writer begins a sentence with a coordinating conjunction. Because this practice might be breaking an instructors' rule, however, students should ask individual teachers what their preferences are.

If a writer decides to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, these three items should be considered:

- Be sure that a main clause follows the coordinating conjunction.

- Do not use a coordinating conjunction to begin *every* sentence. Use this option only when it makes the flow of written ideas more effective.
- Do *not* use a comma *after* the coordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions are not transitional expressions like *for example* or *first of all*. Punctuation will rarely be used after them. (Simmons, 2011)

Some instructors try to carry this myth even further, insisting that some subordinating conjunctions are inappropriate at the beginning of a sentence. One example is the word *however*. The esteemed grammarians Strunk and White (2000) did state in their book, *The Elements of Style*, that writers should not start a sentence with *however* when it means *nevertheless*. Even though the publication was intended as a style guide, countless educators have leaned heavily on *The Elements of Style*, wielding its recommendations as nothing less than grammar laws.

While loyalty to Strunk and White among teachers is common, this may be one rare instance where the majority of modern writers have decided that the classic advice is unreasonable (Aaron, 2006; Hacker, 2011; Scharton & Neuleib, 2001; Spina, 2006). It is obvious to anyone who reads academic or scientific articles that this practice is alive and well—as it should be, since there is nothing wrong with beginning a sentence with *however*. The grammar of its usage should instead be focused on the punctuation, since placing (or not placing) a comma immediately after *however* can literally change the meaning of the sentence.

The comma placement is important because *however* is a conjunctive adverb that can be used in two different ways: it can be a conjunction that joins main clauses, or it can be an adverb that modifies a clause. If *however* is used at the beginning of a sentence and a comma does not follow it, *however* means *in whatever manner* or *to whatever extent,* such as '*However big the fool, there is always a bigger fool to admire him*,' and '*However much you knock at nature's door, she will never answer you in comprehensible words.*' In both of those sentences, *however* is not playing a role as a conjunction. It is not joining anything to anything else. Clearly, the use of *however* in this manner has been undertaken without dispute for well over 300 years.

When a comma is placed after *however* at the beginning of a sentence, it means *nevertheless*. Despite what Strunk and White have to say about it, using *however* at the beginning of a sentence—even with a comma—is a completely legitimate grammatical structure. Some writers prefer using *however* to begin a sentence instead of burying the word in the middle, where making the connection between topics can be less clear and possibly cause confusion (Henning, 2011).

Here are some examples of sentences from famous works that start with *however* when the writer means *nevertheless*:

- Pirsig (2006) wrote in the introduction to the book *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: "*What follows is based on actual occurrences. However, it should in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice.*"
- Charles Dickens wrote this in *Nicholas Nickleby*: "*It is a great deal easier to go down hill than up. However, they kept on, with unabated perseverance.*"

If desired, it is quite easy to avoid starting a sentence with *however* by using a semicolon to connect your two main clauses. In other words, instead of putting a period at the end of the sentence before the *however*, place a semicolon there. For example, Dickens wrote, "*It's a great deal easier to go down hill than up. However, they kept on*," but he just as easily could have put a semicolon in place of the period and written, "*It's a great deal easier to go down hill than up; however, they kept on.*"

However can also be placed inside a sentence with commas on either side. For example, Dickens (2009) buried the *however* in this sentence from *Nicholas Nickelby*: "*Love, however, is very materially assisted by a warm and active imagination.*" Another example: in *Breakfast of Champions*, Kurt Vonnegut (1999) wrote, "*The chief weapon of sea pirates, however, was their capacity to astonish. Nobody else could believe, until it was too late, how heartless and greedy they were.*"

Again, a comma should be placed before and after *however* when it is used in the middle of a sentence in this way. Confusion can arise about whether to use a semicolon or a comma before *however* in the middle of a long sentence. The semicolon is only used when joining two main clauses and the *however* just happens to be making a point of saying *nevertheless*. The semicolon simply acts as a sentence splicer—it splices together two main clauses.[2]

3. Showing Possession in Words Ending with "s"[3]

There are some confusing situations when it comes to apostrophes—especially in making a singular word that ends in the letter *s* possessive. One particular situation arose describing members of the U.S. Supreme Court as they squabbled over making the word

[2] 'Comma' was partly referred to http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/starting-a-sentence-with-however.aspx .

[3] 'Apostrophe' was partly referred to http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/apostrophe-plural-grammar-rules.aspx.

Kansas possessive. Words such as *Kansas* that end with an *s* can be difficult when it comes to apostrophes, such as *Kansas's statute* or *Kansas' statute* with just an apostrophe at the end. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote the majority opinion and prefers to leave off the extra *s*, referring to *Kansas' statute* with just an apostrophe at the end, whereas Justice David Souter wrote the dissenting opinion and prefers the double *s* of *Kansas's statute* with an apostrophe before the final *s*. It is difficult to choose which way is correct. However, Justice Thomas' name ends with an *s*, so he may be more familiar with the issue. *Associated Press* style also recommends leaving off the extra *s*, but other stylebooks such as *Fowler's Modern English Usage* recommend adding the *apostrophe s* to almost all singular words that end with *s*. In some senses, it is grammatically correct either way.

If the word ending with an *s* is plural, such as *aardvarks*, then just an apostrophe is added at the end to make it possessive. For example, "*The aardvarks' escape route was blocked,*" would indicate that a family of aardvarks needed to find another way out of danger. Plural words that do not end with *s*, such as *children*, take an *apostrophe s* at the end for possession. For example, "*Fortunately, the children's room had a hidden doorway.*"

One unusual issue with a definite answer is thought to be how to make the plural of a single letter, as in "*Mind your p's and q's.*" In this case, it is actually correct to use the apostrophe before the *s*. Even though it looks possessive, it is not. The apostrophe makes it clear that multiple *p*'s and *q*'s are being used. The apostrophe is especially important when you are writing about *a*'s, *i*'s, and *u*'s because without the apostrophe readers could easily mistake them for the words *a*s, *is*, and *us*.

An additional issue occurs when one uses an apostrophe to make abbreviations plural, as in "*CD's for sale."* Even though it makes some strict grammarians cringe, it is technically a style issue. Some stylebooks recommend putting in the apostrophe because it indicates that letters are missing while others prefer to leave it out, hoping the reader will understand. In a sentence like, "*Today's TV's are more sophisticated than they were 20 years ago*," it seems awkward to use the apostrophe twice in a row. Also, when using the possessive as in, "*All seven of the Samsung TVs' remotes were missing*," the usage also seems strange. However, both are grammatically correct in those situations.

4. Use of Passive and Active Voice in Writing

The use of passive and active voice is another concern of Western grammar teachers. Many of them discourage students from using the passive voice, claiming it is somehow grammatically inferior to the active voice. Of course, there is absolutely no basis in fact for that assertion. Furthering the confusion is that many people do not understand the difference between active and passive voice. Even though students have been warned to

avoid the passive voice, few students can actually define it or recognize it. In an active sentence, the subject is doing the action. A straightforward example is the sentence "*Bob loves Sue.*" Bob is the subject, and he is doing the action: he loves Sue, the object of the sentence.

Another example is the title of the Marvin Gaye song, "*I Heard It through the Grapevine.*" The subject of the sentence is "I", the one who is doing the action. "I" is hearing "it," the object of the verb in the sentence. In passive voice, the target of the action gets promoted to the subject position. Instead of saying, "*Bob loves Sue*," one would say, "*Sue is loved by Bob.*" The subject of the sentence becomes Sue, but she isn't doing anything. Rather, she is just the recipient of Bob's love. The focus of the sentence has changed from Bob to Sue. To make the title of the Marvin Gaye song passive, it would be changed to, "*It was heard by me through the grapevine*," which is not exactly an easy title to say or remember.

A lot of people are able to think all sentences that contain a form of the verb *to be* are in passive voice, but that doesn't seem to be true. For example, the sentence "*I am holding a pen*," is in active voice, but it uses the verb *am*, which is a form of *to be*. The passive form of that sentence is "*The pen is being held by me.*" Notice that the subject, the pen, isn't doing anything in that sentence. It is not taking an action; it's passive. One clue that a sentence is passive is that the subject is not taking a direct action.

Passive voice is not incorrect in and of itself, but it is often a poor way to present thoughts when speaking or writing. Sometimes passive voice is awkward and other times it is vague. Also, passive voice is usually wordy, so the writing can be tightened up if passive sentences are replaced with active sentences. When put in the passive voice, it is easy to leave out the person or thing doing the action. For example, "*Sue is loved*," is passive. The problem with that sentence is that the reader does not know who loves Sue. Politicians often use passive voice to intentionally obscure the idea of who is taking the action. Ronald Reagan famously said, "Mistakes were made," when referring to the Iran-Contra scandal. Other examples of passive voice for political reasons could include "*Bombs were dropped*," and "*Shots were fired*." Viewers of the news could pay attention to the daily broadcast and listen for examples of passive voice.

A recent study suggested that less-educated people—those who dropped out of school when they were 16—have a more difficult time understanding sentences written in the passive voice than those written in the active voice (Northumbria University, 2010). On the other hand, passive voice does have advantages sometimes. For example, if a writer truly does not know who is taking the action, then he or she cannot name the person. This is especially common with crime reports. A security guard might write, "*The store was robbed,*" because nobody knows the identity of the robber. Passive voice can also be useful in fiction writing. When writing a mystery novel, if the author wanted to highlight a

missing car because it is central to the story, passive voice could be the best option. It would make more sense to write, "*The car was stolen,*" instead of, "*Somebody stole the car.*" The difference is subtle, but in the passive sentence the focus is on the car. In the latter, the focus would be on the unknown somebody. Passive voice can be helpful if a writer wants to create a sense of mystery, but using the passive voice when writing nonfiction is not usually a good choice because clarity is of greater importance.

An exception is that scientists are often encouraged to write in passive voice to lend a sense of objectivity to their writing--to take themselves and their actions and/or opinions out of the experimental results. Some scientific style guides do allow for a limited use of active voice (UNC Writing Center, 2011). It may be acceptable to write, "*We sequenced the DNA*," instead of "*The DNA was sequenced*," but it is still considered bad for scientists to insert themselves into conclusions. It may be bad scientific form to write, "*We believe the mutation causes cancer*," but passive voice is not always needed to achieve certain writing goals. The previous sentence could be changed to "*The data suggests that the mutation causes cancer.*" While it is still active, it eliminates the sense of subjectivity. Watson and Crick's paper (1953) about the discovery of the structure of DNA, written in 1953, contains both active and passive sentences:

- We wish to suggest a structure for the salt of deoxyribose nucleic acid (D.N.A.). (active)
- We have made the usual chemical assumptions, namely, that each chain consists of phosphate diester groups joining beta-D-deoxyribofuranose residues with 3' and 5' linkages. (active)
- If it is assumed that the bases only occur in the structure in the most plausible tautomeric forms (that is, with the keto rather than the enol configurations) it is found that only specific pairs of bases can bond together. (passive)
- It has been found experimentally that the ratio of the amounts of adenine to thymine, and the ratio of guanine to cytosine, are always very close to unity for deoxyribose nucleic acid. (passive)

5. Abbreviations, Meanings, and Punctuation

Some common abbreviations are completely misunderstood by teachers and writers of English. This confusion leads to a complete lack of consistency in their usage, and further muddies the waters for ESL and EFL learners. A good example of this is *i.e.* and *e.g.,* which are both abbreviations for Latin terms.

The first abbreviation, *i.e.,* stands for *id est* and means roughly "that is." The second one, *e.g.,* stands for *exempli gratia*, which means "for example." The easiest way to remember the difference is to think of *i.e.*, which starts with *i,* to mean "in other words," and *e.g.*, which starts with *e*, means "for example." *I* = in other words. *E*= example.

E.g. means "for example," so it can introduce an example: "*Sarah likes card games, e.g., bridge and crazy eights.*" Because *e.g*. appears, the reader knows that a list of examples of card games is provided. It's not a finite list of all card games that exist in; it's just a few examples.

On the other hand, *i.e.* means "in other words," so you use it to introduce a further clarification: "*Sarah likes to play cards, i.e., bridge and crazy eights*." Because *i.e.* was used, which introduces a clarification, the reader knows that these are the only card games that Sarah enjoys.

Here are two more examples:

- Six year-old Jeremy loves watching old cartoons (e.g., Bugs Bunny and Flintstones). The words following *e.g.* are examples, so the reader knows that these are just some of the old cartoons that Jeremy enjoys.
- Six year-old Jeremy loves watching Donald Duck's nephews (i.e., Huey, Dewey, and Louie). The words following *i.e.* provide clarification: they tell the names of Donald Duck's three nephews.

Of course, one can always just write out the words "for example" or "in other words." There's no rule that says a writer has to use the abbreviations. If they are used, however, *i.e.* and *e.g*. should not be italicized; even though they are abbreviations for Latin words, they have been used for so long that they are considered a standard part of the English language. Because they are abbreviations there is always a period after each letter, but placing a comma after *i.e.* and *e.g.* is another matter. Five out of six style guides recommend the comma as Table 1 shows:

Table 1
Abbreviations, Meanings, and Punctuation

Source	Recommendation
Chicago Manual of Style	A comma is usually used after *i.e.* and *e.g.*
Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation	Commas are preferable/optional after the abbreviations.
The Columbia Guide to Standard American English	[Editors] require a comma after the second period [in these abbreviations].
The Guide to Grammar and Writing	The comma [following *i.e.* and *e.g.*] makes good sense.

Lynch Guide to Grammar	Both abbreviations should be followed by a comma.
Fowler's Modern English Usage	Commas do not usually follow *i.e.* (No comment on *e.g.*)

Even though there appears to be a consensus among style guides, they tend to use non-specific words like "usually" and "preferred." In fact, the commas are used less frequently in Britain, and the only style guide that advised against commas was *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, which has its roots in British English.

For ESL and EFL teachers and students, this creates an interesting opportunity to illustrate the difference between *rule* and *preference*. After all, using a comma after *i.e.* and *e.g.* is clearly a matter of style.

6. Choosing Appropriate Articles

A and *an* are called indefinite articles, while *the* is called a definite article. The difference is that *a* and *an* do not say anything special about the words that follow them. For example, in the sentence, "*I need a horse*," the writer will accept any horse—just a horse will do. But if it was, "*I need the horse*," then the writer wants a specific horse. That is why *the* is called a definite article—it is used when the speaker or writer wants something definite.

When choosing which article to use before a noun, many students learned that you put *a* before words that start with consonants and *an* before words that start with vowels. While that will lead to the correct choice most of the time, it's actually a bit more complicated than that. The actual grammar rule is that you use *a* before words that start with a consonant sound and *an* before words that start with a vowel sound (Faigley, 2007).

For example, students often wonder if *a hour* or *an hour* should be used. The letter *h* is a consonant, but the sound at the beginning of the word *hour* is clearly the diphthong of *o* and *u*. That means *an hour* is correct, because *hour* starts with a vowel sound. Words that start with the letters *h* and *u* often create confusion because sometimes these words start with vowel sounds and sometimes they start with consonant sounds. For example, *a hilarious movie* is correct because *hilarious* starts with an *h* sound, but *an honorable fellow* is correct because *honorable* starts with an *o* sound. Similarly, it is *a Utopian idea*, but *an unfair criticism*.

The letters *o* and *m* can be confusing as well. Usually a writer will put *an* before words that start with *o*, but sometimes it is correct to use *a*. For example, the article *a* would used in the following: "*She has a one-track mind.*" This is true because *one-track* starts with a *w* sound. Similarly, "*She has an MBA*," is correct because the consonant *m* in the abbreviation pronounced "Em-Be-Ay" has a vowel sound at the beginning. Other letters

can also be pronounced in multiple ways. Regardless of the actual first letter, it is the sound that governs whether the correct article is *a* or *an*.

One complication is when words are pronounced differently in British and American English. For example, the word for a certain kind of plant, *herb*, is pronounced "erb" in American English and "herb" in British English. So the proper form in America is *an herb*, and the proper form in Britain is *a herb*. In the rare cases where this is a problem, use the form that will be expected in your country or by the majority of your readers.

Some Americans argue whether the article *a* or *an* should be used with the word *historic*. For example, if someone pronounces *historic* as "istoric," an argument can be made for using *an historic*. However, the standard American pronunciation of *historic* is with the h-sound: "historic." Even if some writers pronounce it "istoric," most of their readers will not. Therefore, local or regional accents should not dictate the correct grammatical use of articles when the standard pronunciation clearly calls for one over another.

7. Splitting Infinitives[4]

It is claimed that a rule exists forbidding writers to use a split infinitive. In truth, there is no such rule and the very idea behind this myth is based on a shaky foundation.

To understand split infinitives, it is important to first have a clear definition of the word. Wikipedia defines *infinitive* as the unmarked form of a verb (Wikipedia, 2011), but examples may make it easier to understand what that really means. In English, there are two kinds of infinitives: bare infinitives and full infinitives. Bare infinitives are the kind of verbs usually seen in a dictionary, such as *go, sprinkle, run*, and *split.* Full infinitives are made up of two words, usually putting the word *to* in front of the bare verb: *to go*, *to sprinkle*, *to run*, and *to split.*

A split infinitive puts an adverb between the two parts of the full infinitive. "To generously sprinkle" is a split infinitive because *generously* splits the word *to* from the word *sprinkle*. It is usually said that the origin of the misguided rule against splitting infinitives in English comes from a devotion to Latin that was prominent in the late 1800s. The Victorian Era was a time of great language debate, with dueling dictionaries and people pontificating about language. The conventional wisdom is that people decided that because infinitives cannot be split in Latin, they should not be split in English (Nordquist, 2010).

One of the earliest printed instances of the opinion against splitting infinitives comes from a nineteenth-century book called *The Queen's English* by Alford (1864). Alford was

[4] 'Split infinitive' was partly referred to http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/split-infinitives.aspx.

the Dean of Canterbury and he had given a series of lectures on language and compiled them into a casual book that became quite popular. On split infinitives, Alford wrote (cited from http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/split-infinitives.aspx):

> A correspondent states as his own usage, and defends, the insertion of an adverb between the sign of the infinitive mood and the verb. He gives the instance 'to scientifically illustrate.' But surely this practice is entirely unknown to English speakers and writers. It seems to me that we ever regard the 'to' of the infinitive as inseparable from its verb. And when we have the choice between the two forms of expression 'to scientifically illustrate' and 'to illustrate scientifically,' there seems no good reason for flying in the face of common usage.

It may be that Alford was influenced by the un-split-able Latin infinitives, but in his book he invoked common usage as his reason. It is also odd that he said, "*...surely this practice is entirely unknown to English speakers and writers*," when he was responding to a correspondent who described doing it. Invoking common usage today to argue with the people who think infinitives should not be split would likely not get very far. Detractors would probably say that people also use the word "irregardless," but usage alone does not make something grammatically correct.

Other writers apparently started arguing with Alford about his assertion almost immediately, but for some reason his dictum caught on with teachers who started to preach it as a strict rule. Some continue to do so to this day, even though modern grammar books and style guides say nothing about the evils of splitting an infinitive.

Many times splitting an infinitive can be avoided. Instead of writing "*...to boldly go where no one has gone before*," the *Star Trek* writers could just have easily have written, "*...to go boldly where no one has gone before.*" However, sometimes when writers try to avoid splitting an infinitive it can change the meaning of a sentence. Consider this example: "*Jim decided* to quickly remove *Ann's cats.*" The split infinitive is *to quickly remove*, but if you move the adverb *quickly* before the infinitive, you could imply that Jim made the decision quickly, as in "*Jim decided quickly to remove Ann's cats.*" If the adverb appears at the end of the sentence—"*Jim decided to remove Ann's cats quickly"*—then it is potentially ambiguous. Rewriting the sentence without the split infinitive is possible: "*Jim decided to grab Ann's cats and set them free before she got back from the corner market.*"

That last example is clear and does not have a split infinitive, but it also is not necessary to rewrite the sentence unless it is important that the writing be as safe as possible. The bottom line is that writers can usually avoid splitting infinitives if they want to, but do not believe the myth that it is somehow forbidden.

8. Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

For more than half a century, teachers have sworn that ending a sentence in a preposition goes against some unwritten rule of English. This may be the most grievous of all grammar myths, mostly because so many people believe that it is actually true.

Generally speaking, a preposition is a word that creates a relationship between other words. Most of the time, they introduce prepositional phrases, which consist of a preposition, the object of the preposition—a noun—and any number of modifiers and compliments that fall in and around the two. It has been said that prepositions often deal with space and time (Huddleston & Pullman, 2006). For example, the prepositions *above*, *by*, and *over* all say something about a position in space; the prepositions *before*, *after*, and *since* all say something about time.

Since readers expect prepositions to be followed by—at the very least—a noun acting as object of the preposition, one can see why leaving a preposition at the end of a sentence would seem quite careless and incomplete. But there are many sentences where the final preposition is part of a phrasal verb or is necessary to keep the sentence from being vague or ambiguous.

Here is an example of a sentence that can and should end with a preposition: "*What did you step on?*" A key point is that the sentence does not have the same meaning if the preposition at the end is removed. It does not make sense to write "*What did you step*?" Moving the preposition to the front of the sentence does not solve the problem either, as in "*On what did you step?*" People do not generally speak or write in such a way. Other examples of sentences that can and should end with prepositions would be "*I'm going to throw up*," "*Let's kiss and make up*," and "*What are you waiting for?*"

No matter how many legitimate examples are illustrated, it should not be assumed that any and all sentences can end with a preposition. Even grammarians who are progressive enough to allow some sentences to end with prepositions hold to the notion that it is acceptable only if the preposition is not extraneous or redundant. One example is, "*Where are you at?*" Obviously, this sentence does not need the preposition at the end. If the writer chose "*Where are you?*" it would mean the same thing. Therefore, *at* is unnecessary and should be left off. In fact, it would be a grammatical error to include it.

Unnecessary prepositions do not only happen at the end of sentences. People often throw extraneous prepositions into the middle of sentences that simply do not belong (Strumpf & Douglas, 2004). Instead of writing "*Billy jumped off of the dock*," it is much better to write "*Billy jumped off the dock*." This is yet another example where the latter sentence says the same thing as the former without the preposition. Another example is *outside of* when *outside* by itself would suffice. A writer should choose, "*He is outside the door*," not, "*He is outside of the door.*"

English has a type of verb called a phrasal verb, which are verbs made up of multiple words—and one of them is usually a preposition. *Cheer up*, *run over*, *log on*, and *leave off* are all examples of phrasal verbs, and often sentences that use phrasal verbs end with a preposition: "*I wish he would cheer up*," and "*You should leave it off.*" These and other similar structures are perfectly acceptable sentences.

It is also correct to end a sentence with a preposition even when a phrasal verb is not being used. Although some sentences could be rewritten to avoid ending them with a preposition, it is not always necessary. For example, "*She displayed the good humor she's known for.*" This could be rewritten as "*She displayed the good humor for which she's known,*" even though both are equally correct. In much the same way, "*I want to know where he came from*," is just as acceptable as "*I want to know from where he came.*"

Finally, according to *Words into Type* (Gay & Skillin, 1974), Winston Churchill once defended the practice of the terminal preposition by stating the following: "*This is the kind of nonsense up with which I will not put*."

III. CONCLUSION

Of course, this effort represents a very incomplete list of grammar myths and issues. A few that were not illustrated include the following: starting a sentence with *There is* or *There are*, using *more than* instead of *over* with numbers, how the term *data* became accepted as either singular or plural (and how the word *datum*—the singular of data—stopped being used regularly), why possessives in front of gerunds should be eliminated, the overuse of capitalization, the misuse and confusion over semicolons, using the relative pronoun *who* or *that* with animals—especially house pets—and whether to allow pronouns like *they*, *them*, and *their* to be both plural and singular just as *you*, *you*, and *your* are.

For all of these issues and more, decisions need to be made so that both educators and students can all end up on the same page for English grammar. This is especially important for ESL and EFL students, who need consistent rules and guidelines to aid them in their second language acquisition.

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Mun Koo Kang
Department of English Education, Kongju National University
182 Shingwan-dong Gongju-si, Chungnam, 314-701, Korea
Tel: +82-10-3090-1129
Email: kangmunkoo@hanmail.net

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