

Please, speak proper English

I have read with interest Laurie Roberts' recent columns on the AIMS test. I can't believe anyone passes the English portion of the test, unless young people know grammar better than their speech indicates.

For instance, Roberts quotes a third-grade teacher as saying, "Every nine weeks I send home report cards with straight Fs, and I have yet to receive one phone call, note or visit from a parent concerned about their child's learning."

The teacher should have said, "...from a parent concerned about his or her child's learning." "Their" is plural, not singular.

I have heard TV news anchors, radio announcers, and even Dr. Phil make this same error over and over.

And by the way, Dr. Phil and the rest of you younger folks, it is "between you and me" not "between you and I." You use "I" when it is the subject of the sentence. If it is the subject of a prepositional phrase or a dependent clause, you use "me."

Evidently grammar, along with history, geography and civics, is no longer taught in our schools. So what does the AIMS test test?

- Bobbi Dugan, Queen Creek

Me and my friends don't agree with your idea of propriety.

A response to Bobbi Dugan

Linguists must make an extremely essential distinction between descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar. The former involves syntax, the real rules which allow various languages to generate utterances. The latter involves aesthetics, opinions, and subjective interpretations. Sticklers of prescriptive grammar tend to be much like religious fanatics. They were taught the “right” way to speak and write at a very early age and dogmatically insist all others do so for the rest of their lives. However, the “proper” use of a language changes not only from generation to generation but also from region to region and from social class to social class. In regards to the use of “their” for the singular third person pronoun, perhaps the writer might not be aware of something known as the feminist movement. Ever since the sexes began their slow and arduous struggle toward equalization, many variations have been tried on to eliminate the awkward and bulky sounding “he and/or she.” “Their” has overwhelmingly been gaining acceptance as an ambiguous third person singular pronoun, as well as “you guys” having become an acceptable second person plural while “gal” has been swept into the dustbin. If you don't like it, too bad, it's happening anyway. When the Normans insisted their English subjects address them with the second person **plural** pronoun “ye” instead of the second person **singular** pronoun “thee,” in an attempt to create a formal and informal address system similar to what exists in French and Spanish, English speakers simply stopped using “thee” and decided everyone should be addressed formally. For those who wish to make a stink about “proper” language use, perhaps they might find comfort amongst the Quakers and Mennonites, who still stick to the old “proper” ways of speaking.

-The Polemic Linguist