

# Confusion created over 'me' and 'myself'

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Last year, two interesting linguistic things happened in the EDP on the very same day.

David Harrison wrote a letter asking what had happened to the word 'me' – he reckoned people are saying 'myself' instead.

And one of the EDP columnists wrote in their column that "it is not good form for we linguistically lazy Brits to criticise".

I agreed with David – you can hear footballers avoiding the word 'me' every Saturday about 5pm: "myself and Holtz worked very well together". And I also wholeheartedly agreed about linguistic laziness.

But I couldn't help observing that Norfolk speakers know it isn't good grammar to say 'it's not good form for we'. Obviously it should be 'for us'.

Fascinatingly, these two things are linked. David gave a clue as to how.

People "with less grammar" than the Queen, he wrote, say 'me and my husband'. But, actually, while it may not be polite to put yourself first, "me and my husband" is perfectly good grammar.

Natural English uses 'I' and 'me' only as the single subject of a verb: 'I like it, we like it'. Otherwise, we use 'me' and 'us': John likes me, He likes John and me, He likes us, John and me went, Us Norwich fans are a rum lot.

And in answer to the question: "Who's there?" we say "Me!". French is the same.



**GOOD GRAMMAR:** The Queen may use the phrase 'my husband and I', but it would also be correct for her to say 'me and my husband', says Peter Trudhill.

You can't say 'je' in answer to the question "Qui est là" – it has to be 'moi'.

Sadly, the English language has been plagued by generations of self-appointed "experts" with an inferiority complex about Latin who think English ought to have "nominative" (subject) and "accusative" cases.

It's "wrong", they pontificate, to say 'John and me went' because 'me' is "accusative" (it isn't).

This clash between the grammar of natural English and the pseudo-Latin grammar of the "experts" has got people confused. So sometimes they "hypercorrect"

– they try and speak "correctly" and overdo it, using 'we' when 'us' would be correct, as in "for we Brits", as the columnist did. And sometimes people are so uncertain about what to say that they develop clever escape strategies. If you don't know whether to say 'I' or 'me', well, you can just say 'myself' instead, and avoid the problem.

If only the self-appointed "experts" had let people feel comfortable about using the natural grammar of their own native English dialects, there would never have been a problem in the first place!

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