

Linguistics 30Q. 4/22/05.

Crucial background: English has two verb forms traditionally called “participles”: the “present participle”, or “-ing form” (*jumping, seeing, being*), and the “past participle”, or “-en form” (*jumped, seen, been*). [Warning: -ing-form VPs can be used as nominals – *Jumping through fiery hoops is dangerous* – as well as modifiers – *Jumping through fiery hoops to reach the classroom, Kim looked ferocious*. Another warning: -en-form Vs – *Kim has often jumped through fiery hoops* – often look the same as past-tense Vs – *Kim jumped through fiery hoops*. Compare: *Kim has often been adventurous* and *Kim was adventurous*.]

1. For M 25 April and W 27 April: Read the MWDEU entries on **dangling modifier**; **sentence adverb**; and **hopefully**. For M 25 April: Be prepared to discuss the content of these articles.

2. For W 27 April: Skim through the collection of dangles on the SIS05 site (also available directly as <http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~zwicky/dangle.exx.pdf>). Pick out, for class discussion, a few examples of each of three types: (1) examples that seem perfectly fine to you; (2) examples that are problematic in isolation, but improve significantly in context; and (3) examples that seem irretrievably bad. Also be prepared to discuss “modifier attachment” problems, as in the following delights from the *Palo Alto Daily News*:

(a) In June 2003, an infant was found partially buried under a tree with his umbilical cord and placenta attached in Milpitas.

(David Weinstein, “Child found dead”, PADN 7/9/04, p. 70)

(b) First block of Mosswood Way, 7:52 p.m.: A resident reported a large animal in a tree with tall and pointed ears. Responding officers found no animal.

(PADN, 4/19/05, Atherton police blotter for preceding Sunday)

3. For F 29 April, to turn in as written homework, three things:

(1) A small collection (5-10 examples) of dangling modifiers that you collected yourself, from reading or listening; please don’t just quote examples from advice books or articles. Try to get examples of each of the types (1)-(3) above, and try to restrict yourself to classic dangling modifiers (which are sentence-initial sentence adverbials), rather than modifier attachment problems like those in (a) and (b) above. Discuss each example briefly.

(2) A critical discussion of Richard Lederer’s column “Don’t Dangle Your Participles in Public” (handed out in hard copy today, but also available on the SIS05 site and directly as <http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~zwicky/lederer.funnytimes.pdf>). Don’t try to discuss every example, but instead pick out repeated themes. Some things to think about: Do these examples in fact involve participles? Are they all classic dangling modifiers, or are some of them something else? Do some of them involve punctuation problems, rather than syntactic ones? Would some of them improve in context? Can they all be fixed by the *AP Press Guide*’s advice to put them “close to the word they purport to modify”?

(3) A first proposal for a project for this course. Your task will be to pick a piece of grammatical advice – time to skim through MWDEU again, though it’s also fine to pick a “rule” that MWDEU doesn’t discuss, or just barely mentions – and prepare a guide for teaching this “rule” to high school students preparing for a multiple-choice exam, like the PSAT, on which the “rule” might be tested. For next Friday, your task is to choose the “rule” you will teach and explain, briefly, why this is a good choice. You may offer more than one choice, and then we’ll talk about which one you should go with.

The actual paper should do two things. First, it should provide a kind of lesson plan, with some justification for it. What examples do you use, and what do you say about them? What alternatives do you offer to the “incorrect” usages. If students don’t understand what’s wrong with the examples you give them, what do you say to them? What features of English syntax will you need to refer to to make it possible for your students to go past the examples you give them, so as to apply the “rule” to new cases?

Second, you should critically consider the “rule” itself: What do you say to your students about the status of this “rule” in the actual practice of speakers and writers of English? What advice would you give them about the “rule” in their own speech and/or writing?

In the first part, you accept the “rule” as a fact of test-taking life. In the second part, you consider the “rule” in real life, using the sort of viewpoint that MWDEU takes on such things.

We’ll talk about your proposals in class. Eventually, you will give an oral presentation of the paper, and then a written version.