English Corner 9: who and whom

Who and **whom** are both relative and interrogative pronouns, depending on their use. **Who** is in the *nominative* (subject) case and **whom** the *accusative* (object) case. **Who** is used as a subject whether in a question [**Who** gave the book to the man?] or as a relative pronoun [I gave it to the man **who** has a book]. **Whom** is an indirect object, whether in a question [To **whom** did you give the book? **Whom** did you give the book to?] or as a relative pronoun [The man **to whom** I gave a book. **To whom** it may concern].

Although this rule is simple, **who** and **whom** are often used incorrectly, especially when one's attention is distracted by a *clause* that separates the **subject** or **object** from its **verb**.

Comparison with *he* and *him*

- A simple way to remember when to use **who** and when **whom** is to consider whether you could use **he** (*nominative* case) or **him** (*accusative* case) in their place.
- If **he** would be used [**He** gave the book to the man], use **who** [**Who** gave the book to the man?]; if **him** [She gave the book to **him**], use **whom** [She gave the book to **whom**?], which is more usually written as [To **whom** did she give the book?].

Applying sequential procedures

- When clauses separate subject and object from the verb, **who** and **whom** can be **distinguished** by applying the following sequential procedures: **(a) separating** the clause by commas; **(b) removing** the clause; **(c) checking** whether **who** (*nominative*) is the subject of the verb or **whom** (*accusative*) is the object of the verb; **(d)** if necessary, **changing who** for **whom** or *vice versa*, and finally **(e) replacing** the omitted words.

Example: *Who* written instead of *whom*

- With [I congratulated the student to **who** *I was sure* the prize was given], separation of the clause by commas **(a)** yields [I congratulated the student to **who,** *I was sure,* the prize was given]; removing the clause **(b)** yields [I congratulated the student to **who** the prize was given]; checking whether **who** is the subject of the verb **(c)** reveals that this is not the case: **who** is *nominative* but used here as the *indirect object* of the verb **given**; **(d)** changing **who** to **whom** gives [I congratulated the student to **whom** the prize was given] and replacing the omitted words **(e)** gives the correct wording [I congratulated the student to **whom** *I was sure* the prize was given].

Example: *Whom* written instead of *who*

- Similarly, with [I gave it to the student **whom** *I was sure* was the author], process **(a)** yields [I gave it to the student **whom,** *I was sure,* was the author]; **(b)** yields [I gave it to the student **whom** was the author]; **(c)** reveals that the wrong word has been used: **whom** is *accusative* but used here as the *subject* of the verb **was**; **(d)** gives [I gave it to the student **who** was the author] and **(e)** gives the correct wording [I gave it to the student **who** *I was sure* was the author].

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