

## ‘Strictly between you and me ... (or you and I?)’

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I often watch TV drama with the subtitles on, even though my hearing is fine, because it helps me focus on dialogue. When I was watching *Neighbours* recently, one of the characters – Sheila – said this:

‘I’m putting together a really nice lunch for Des and I.’

What interested me about this line was the ‘for Des and I’ part. According to standard English grammar, the line should have been:

‘I’m putting together a really nice lunch for Des and **me**.’

That’s because *for* is a **preposition** – a word that expresses a relationship between two people or things in space and time. Common prepositions include *across, at, between, in, on, over, near, to, under* and *with*. And **after a preposition we use object pronouns** (*me, you, her, him, us, them*), not subject pronouns (*I, you, she, he, we, they*). Note that *you* is the same for both subject and object. Sheila then explained what was going on at this lunch:

‘**Des and I** are on a fake date.’

Here, Sheila and Des are the **subjects** of the sentence. They are doing the thing the sentence is about – having a fake date. So *I*, a subject pronoun, is correct.

In the first sentence we looked at, Sheila is the subject in the first part and one of the **objects** in the final part. She said:

‘I’m putting together a really nice lunch **for Des and I**.’

That preposition *for* is the trigger for object pronouns to come into play. Instead of doing something, like subjects, they are being done to. So if Sheila (or the scriptwriter) was a stickler for grammar, she would have used the object pronoun and said, ‘for Des and **me**’.

But Sheila didn’t. She said what she thinks is correct and/or what she hears around her. **A phrase you often hear people say is ‘between you and I’ instead of ‘between you and me’.**

There’s a widespread misconception that *me* is somehow incorrect or informal and should be avoided. But it’s quite correct to say ‘between you and me’ (object pronouns after a preposition), just as you’d say ‘between us and them’ or ‘between him and her’.

So where does this leave you as a writer? **If you are writing dialogue in fiction, you are aiming for authenticity.** What do people like your characters actually say?

In a single scene, you might decide to have an older, bookish character use the correct but casual-sounding ‘between you and me’, and a younger, edgier character use the incorrect but polite-sounding ‘between you and I’. You’ve understood the grammar rule, but you’ve **broken it with purpose** in the interests of authenticity. In non-fiction writing, there’s less scope to go against standard grammar in this way. But take some time to research **zombie grammar rules** (for example, ‘never start a sentence with *and*’) to make sure you aren’t restricting your style unnecessarily.

If you want to strengthen your understanding of pronouns, prepositions and using them together, here’s some useful [guidance from Grammar Revolution](#).