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e-GMAT LLC



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[PRONOUNS – DEBUNKING MYTH 1]

Hi Folks,

Thank you for all the appreciation for the first article in this pronoun series. ☺

Without wasting any more time let us get started with the popular myths around pronouns and debunk them once and for all.



MYTH 1

A PRONOUN CAN REFER ONLY TO THE NEAREST NOUN.

SOURCE OF THIS MYTH

This myth usually arises when a student somehow confuses pronoun usage with modifier usage. Modifiers usually tend to modify the nearest entity. Remember?

Placement of a modifier is pretty important because a misplaced modifier can end up modifying an entity is not supposed to modify. Hence generally modifiers are placed closer to the entity they are meant to modify. Somehow test takers extend this rule to pronoun usage also, giving way to this myth that pronoun can refer only to the nearest noun.

LET'S DEBUNK THIS MYTH

There is no such thing that a pronoun has to refer to the closest noun. Let us debunk this myth with the help of a few simple examples and then we will substantiate this point with Official examples.

Simple Example 1: *Although the discovery of America was not intentional and Columbus actually believed that he discovered India, it is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*

The pronoun “he” unambiguously refers to the noun “Columbus”. So the usage of “he” is correct.

What about the pronoun “it”? Is it used correctly or is there any error in its usage.

In the sentence, what are the possible antecedents for the singular pronoun “it”?

“Discovery, America, India, Modern History”.

Now let us look at the following sentences and see which one of them makes sense.

- a. *The discovery (of America) is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*
- b. *America is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*
- c. *India is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*
- d. *Modern History is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*

Does the first sentence make sense in this context?

Yes. It absolutely does.

The discovery (of America) is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History, even though it (the discovery) was unintentional.

This makes perfect sense. Therefore **“discovery” is a logical antecedent of the pronoun “it” even though the antecedent is far away from the pronoun.**

What about the second sentence? Does it make sense in this context?

First of all the sentence “*America is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History*” itself doesn’t make sense! (How can a country be a turning point in History? Events, Actions etc. can be turning points in History, not Countries or other places.)

So it isn’t even logical to say “*America is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History even though the discovery of America was unintentional*”!

Therefore **“America” is not a logical antecedent of the pronoun “it” in this sentence.**

We can reject “India” too on similar reasoning. (Even though “India” is the nearest noun.)

Now what about the fourth sentence?

The sentence itself isn't logical. First of all History as a whole cannot be a turning point. The major events in a history are considered as its turning points. Moreover the sentence is same as saying "A monkey is one of the most commonly found animal among monkeys".

Therefore "Modern History" is not a logical antecedent of the pronoun "it" in this sentence.

Therefore the pronoun "it" has only one logical antecedent (**discovery**) and the sentence is correct.

*Although the **discovery of America** was not intentional and Columbus actually believed that **he** discovered India, **it** is widely acclaimed as one of the major turning points in Modern History.*

This sentence reiterates the fact that the distance between a pronoun and its antecedent doesn't matter as long as there is only one antecedent which is logical".

Please note that this doesn't mean that pronoun cannot refer to a nearer noun. Consider the following example.

Simple Example 2: *Even though there was a chance of attack for the lion, it walked away without harming the deer.*

Here in this sentence, as you can see, the pronoun "it" can logically refer only to the noun "lion". Look at the following two sentences and see which one of them makes sense in this context.

- a. The lion walked away without harming the deer, even though there was a chance of attack for the lion. (Perfect!!)
- b. The deer walked away without harming the deer, even though there was a chance of attack for the lion. (Is this even logical?)

The first sentence makes perfect sense and therefore we can definitely say that "**lion**" is a logical antecedent of the pronoun "it".

On the other hand, the second sentence isn't even logical. So "**deer**" is not the logical antecedent of the pronoun "it".

Therefore the pronoun "it" in this sentence has only one logical antecedent (**lion**) and it so happens in this case that the pronoun is referring to the nearest noun.

Even though there was a chance of attack for the lion, it walked away without harming the deer.

Note that this need not always be the case as we have already seen in Example 1.

Now let us look at a couple of official sentences.

Official Sentence 1: Although Napoleon's army entered Russia with far more supplies than for any previous campaign, **it** had provisions for only twenty-four days.

Here, even though the noun “Napoleon’s army” is very far from the pronoun “it”, there is no error in the usage. The pronoun “it” can logically refer only to the noun “Napoleon’s army” and not “Russia” or “campaign”.

It is not logical to say that “Although Napoleon’s army entered Russia with more supplies, Russia had provisions for only twenty four days”.

How do the supplies with Napoleon’s army matter to Russia?

The amount of provisions with Russia are independent of what Napoleon’s army has.

Similarly, it is not logical to say that “Although Napoleon’s army entered Russia with more supplies, campaign had provisions for only twenty-four days.” (A campaign cannot have provisions. Note that in the context of this sentence, a campaign is a military mission and provisions are supplies for survival.)

However, it is logical to say that “...Napoleon's army had provisions for only twenty-four days.”

Although Napoleon's army entered Russia with far more supplies than for any previous campaign, **it** had provisions for only twenty-four days.

Therefore there is only one logical antecedent of the pronoun “it” in this sentence and the sentence is correct (even though the antecedent is far away from the pronoun).

Official Sentence 2: Because an oversupply of computer chips has sent prices plunging, the manufacturer has announced that **it** will cut production by closing **its** factories for two days a month.

Here both the pronouns “it” and “its” can refer only to the noun “manufacturer”, even though the noun “production” is nearer to the pronouns.

Because an oversupply of computer chips has sent prices plunging, the **manufacturer** has announced that **it** will cut production by closing **its** factories for two days a month.

(Observe that except for “manufacturer”, no other noun makes sense to be referred to by “it” or “its” in the context of the sentence.)

SUMMARY

To summarize, wherever a pronoun is used, we replace the pronoun with the possible antecedents and check if the sentences made sense.

If no antecedents make sense, we say there is no logical antecedent to the pronoun.

If more than one antecedent makes sense, we say that there is a pronoun ambiguity in the sentence.

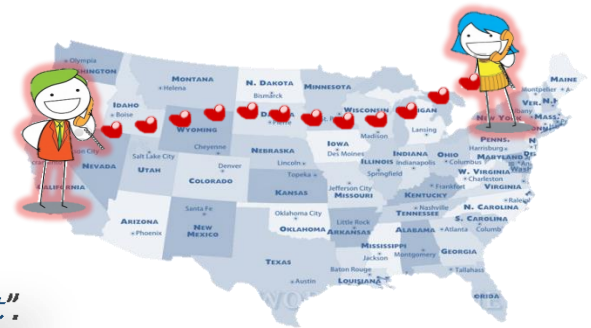
TAKEAWAY

We have now successfully debunked a myth.

“Long Distance Relationships **CAN** work”.
(Noun-Pronoun relationships) ☺

The antecedent can be faraway.

“A pronoun should have only one Logical Antecedent”.



EXERCISE QUESTION

Try this exercise question to see how well you understand pronoun usage.

Identify the possible antecedents for the pronoun and check if the pronoun usage is correct or not.

We will provide the OA as soon as we get some responses.

Banana corp., which is aware of the fact that it has a high likelihood of producing faults, continues to use the new Flexi Mixie Screen.

Cheers, ☺

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