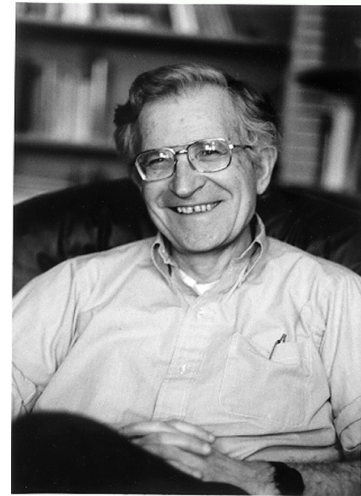


## Descriptive or Prescriptive?



“Don’t use double negatives!”  
“Don’t split infinitives!”

“In English, adjectives precede the nouns they modify.”



### Prescriptive rules:

- Not natural
- Arbitrary
- Need to be taught
- Usually seek to *proscribe* forms that are already in use

### Descriptive rules:

- Natural
- Followed intuitively
- Need not be taught

**Which of the following rules are descriptive, and which are prescriptive? Can you think of words or sentences that *you* use that violate these rules?**

1. Form the English regular past tense by adding *-ed* to the verb.
2. Saying “I” is better than saying “me”.
3. “Whom” is used as the object of a verb and must not be confused with “who”.
4. The sound sequence *rt* is acceptable at the end of a word in English, but not the beginning.
5. “Ain’t” is not a word.

Can you think of other prescriptive rules? Or descriptive?

**Consider the following sentence, each of which is acceptable to some speakers of English. Try to identify the prescriptive rules that are violated in each case. What is the reaction of linguists to the claim that sentences like these are “wrong”?**

- a) He don’t know about the race.
- b) You was out when I called.
- c) There’s twenty horses registered in the show.
- d) That window’s broke, so be careful.
- e) Jim and me are gonna go campin’ this weekend.
- f) Who did you come with?
- g) I seen the parade last week.
- h) He been lost in the woods for ten days.
- i) My car needs cleaned ‘cause of the rain.
- j) Julie ain’t got none.
- k) Somebody left their book on the train.
- l) Murray hurt hissself in the game.