

GENEALOGIC

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FATHER, MOTHER, and a few other genealogical words (DAD, MOM, POP, MA, PA, GRANDFATHER, GRANDMOTHER, etc.) have the unusual property of generating sentences that are true or false, depending on the number of words used and how they are read. Consider the word FATHER in the following sentences:

1. FATHER'S FATHER. Taken as a full sentence, it means "The man we call 'Father' is the man we call 'Father,'" and this is true - a tautology. (In the rest of the article, "The man we call 'Father'" will be abbreviated as TMWCF.)

2. FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER. This can be interpreted in two ways, depending on which 'S is taken as the contraction for the verb IS: "TMWCF is the Father of TMWCF" or "TMWCF's Father is TMWCF." In other words, "TMWCF is his own Father" or "TMWCF's Father is TMWCF." Both are, of course, false.

3. FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER. Progressing from left to right, the sentence can read in three different ways: "TMWCF is his own Grandfather," "TMWCF's Father is TMWCF's Father," or "TMWCF's Grandfather is TMWCF." The first and third interpretations are false, but the second interpretation is, like the first example, a tautology. Condensing it further, it means "Grandfather is Grandfather."

4. FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER. No matter which 'S is taken to mean IS, none of these are true.

5. FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER'S FATHER. Again, the only true interpretation is the case where the middle 'S means IS and all other apostrophes indicate possession.

The sentence can be extended forever, and the true/false value observes the same rule: the sentence is true only when an even number of words are used, and then only when the middle 'S is taken to be a contraction for the verb IS.