

IT'S RAINING, IT'S POURING.

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Do teachers still tell students not to say "They say summer's going to be cool" or "They say magenta and turquoise are the hot new colors" because "they" in this usage is too indefinite? "Who does it refer to?" was always the standard question my teacher posed. "Who are 'they' who are doing all these things?" she would ask emphatically, then go into something about antecedents. (Have antecedents been eliminated from modern curricula?)

I suppose contemporary teachers have no knowledge of this old concern, and possibly don't feel antecedents are necessary to get along in the world anyway and think "They say" is just ducky.

Anyway, the whole issue came to mind recently when I suddenly asked myself "What is the antecedent for 'it' which is always doing so many things?"

It's raining. It's pouring. It's hot. It's hard to get a job. In the first three cases we know that the weather is being referred to. But grammatically there is no reference to weather. One could possibly say "The weather is rainy today" or whatever, but we all know what is meant when we say "It's raining." The expression is an idiom, and as anyone in the grammar business knows, to call something an idiom is simply a way grammarians shrug their shoulders and say "It may not be logical or grammatically correct but that's just the way it is done."

So one could say with just as much cause that "They say" is equally as understandable an idiom for "It is said that" as "It's snowing." Logic has never been one of language's strong points. It is simply brimming with illogic and idioms that violate every possible rule. "They say" certainly seems one of the more defensible ones. Anyway...that's what I say.