

You can just give those documents to myself’: Untriggered reflexive pronouns in 21st century spoken British English

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1. Introduction

Reflexive pronouns, such as *myself*, *herself*, *yourselves*, share a real-world referent with other components of the clause (or local domain) in which they occur. As such, they require a coreferent noun phrase (NP) to fulfil their syntactic criteria. In the sentence ‘The cat washes herself’, the NP *the cat* and the reflexive pronoun *herself* correspond to the same entity and share a syntactic bond. However, despite formal syntactic constraints, reflexive pronouns are used without coreferent NPs in (some varieties of) English (Parker, Riley and Meyer 1990). For example, in ‘It’s nearly as beautiful and slender as yourself’ (an attested example from the present dataset) the reflexive *yourself* has nothing to bind with. The real-world referent of *yourself* is recoverable in discourse due to context, but is not encoded in syntax. This chapter uses the BNC2014 Early Access Subset (EAS) to investigate the use of these so-called ‘untriggered’ reflexive pronouns. In particular, it takes a sociolinguistic approach and investigates whether the use of untriggered forms correlates with social variables such as age, sex, social class, and location.¹ The chapter also considers the syntactic distribution of untriggered reflexives, such as their use in coordinated NPs.

Existing research concerning reflexive pronouns tends to focus on their syntactic patterns, usually referring to binding theory (see section 2). However, untriggered reflexives are rarely considered in their own right, and are usually discussed only as a component of a wider

¹ Although it analyses correlations between social variables and linguistic variants, this analysis is not variationist *per se*. Variationist analysis would include not only those occurrences where untriggered reflexives occur, but all potential sites where untriggered forms could be used. Due to the sheer volume of potential sites for untriggered reflexives, plus their rarity, a full variationist analysis is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

reflexive agreement system. The binding-focused literature does not consider sociolinguistic factors which may influence the use of untriggered reflexives, yet there is evidence that pragmatic constraints are important for pronoun choice. Section 2 provides an overview of existing research on reflexive pronoun use. It also foregrounds work in corpus linguistics which demonstrates the viability of this methodological approach for analysing pronouns. Section 3 details the data selection criteria, query terms, and data coding procedures, whilst the analysis is presented in section 4. The analysis is split into two parts, the first of which considers the syntactic distribution of untriggered reflexives, and the second which investigates their correlation with socio-demographic variables. The results of these analyses are related back to the wider literature in section 5.

2. Reflexive and untriggered reflexive pronouns

Within syntactic theory, reflexive pronouns are separated from personal pronouns in their agreement pattern in terms of binding theory (Chomsky 1981). Reflexive pronouns bind with their antecedent within a local domain (Principle A), whilst personal pronouns coindex with NPs outside their local domain (Principle B) – see Cunnings and Felser (2013, 189). Edwards and Varlokosta (2007, 426) cite the following illustrative examples:

- 1) [IP John_i thinks that [IP Bill_j likes himself_{*i/j}]]²
- 2) [IP John_i thinks that [IP Bill_j likes him_{i/*j}]]

Following the principles of binding theory, example (1) is read as *himself* referring back to *Bill*, with the alternative reading (coreference between *John* and *himself*) being considered ungrammatical. Conversely, when a personal pronoun is used, as in example (2), *John* and *him* are coindexed, whilst the alternative reading, where *him* and *Bill* share a syntactic bond, is ungrammatical. Based on relatively unproblematic examples, such as these, reflexives and

² Asterisks denote an ungrammatical construction (according to the principles of binding theory).

personal pronouns are considered to be in complementary distribution (Runner, Sussman and Tannenhaus 2003, B2), a position which cannot explain untriggered reflexives, such as (3):

3) [IP You_i can give those documents to myself_{*i/j}]

4) [IP You_i can give those documents to me_j]

In (3) the reflexive pronoun *myself* has nothing to bind with as it cannot be coreferent with the subject NP *you*: they are expressions of different grammatical persons and must have different real-world referents. There is no coreferent element for *myself* and thus it is ‘referentially incomplete’ (Sportiche 2013, 189). Such occurrences are termed untriggered reflexive pronouns (c.f. Parker, Riley and Meyer 1990)³ and are traditionally considered to be ungrammatical (van Gelderen 2000). Under the rules of binding theory, one would expect a personal pronoun, as shown in (4). Whilst (3) appears to flout syntactic rules, and there is evidence to suggest that such constructions have increased processing time in the brain (c.f. Cunnings and Sturt 2014), untriggered reflexives can be understood. In (3), the first-person singular *myself*, combined with an awareness of the wider discourse context, leads to an understanding that the speaker/writer of (3) is the referent of *myself*. As such, the existence of untriggered reflexive pronouns cannot be accounted for by syntactic theory alone.

Parker, Riley and Meyer (1990, 61) argue that reflexives are ‘fundamentally anaphoric and identify their referents as the discourse referent (i.e. the topic of the discourse)’ a process which they hold distinct from pronoun/antecedent resolution. They argue that, by contrast, pronouns ‘are fundamentally exophoric and identify their referents as discourse participants (i.e. the speaker or the addressee)’. To illustrate this distinction, they propose that a speaker who uses a pronoun in constructions such as (5) is foregrounding their ‘role as a discourse participant’,

³ Hernández (2012:124) notes that untriggered reflexives, are also labelled ‘unbound’ or ‘absolute’ reflexives, or ‘independent self-forms’. For coherence, the term *untriggered reflexives* is used throughout this chapter.

whilst the alternative (6) would highlight their ‘role as the discourse referent – the topic of the discourse’ (Parker, Riley and Meyer 1990, 60).

5) [IP This is a picture of *me*]

6) [IP This is a picture of *myself*]

By referring to both the wider co-text and context of such (hypothetical) utterances, Parker, Riley and Meyer move away from the syntactic constraints on reflexive pronouns and towards a consideration of pragmatics. They develop a ‘hierarchy of acceptability’ (1990, 63), which proposes that particular untriggered reflexives are more acceptable than others based on the absence of case marking, whether there is a discourse referent, and whether the untriggered form is first- or second-person. But the authors do not explain who gets to measure acceptability, nor do they test their example sentences on other native speakers.

As such, Parker, Riley and Meyer’s explanation of untriggered reflexive pronouns is not entirely satisfactory. Furthermore, their work highlights one of the main problems with existing research on untriggered reflexives, insofar as they rely on introspective examples. As has been shown before, when corpora are analysed in response to claims based on introspection, such imagined examples are unlikely to cover all possibilities and trends in language use (for an example see McEnery and Wilson’s (2001) analysis of ‘to perform magic’). Furthermore, despite allusions to ‘acceptability’ Parker, Riley and Meyer do not consider external, social constraints on the use of reflexive pronouns, including potentially-relevant phenomena such as linguistic security (c.f. Labov 1972) or links to formality. One way to address such issues is to determine whether multiple speakers produce untriggered reflexives in similar syntactic environments and also to investigate the social context of their interactions.

In her empirical research on the discourse-pragmatic functions of what she terms ‘*self-forms*’, Hernández (2015, 14) argues that ‘[a]lthough they are still stigmatised by unfaltering advocates of grammatical correctness, they [untriggered reflexives] are regularly found in spontaneous speech as well as writing, across multiple varieties of English’. Hernández suggests that untriggered reflexives are ‘unbound exophoric forms’ (2015, 46) which are easily understood in speech because their referent is identifiable from the wider discourse and context. She follows Parker, Riley and Meyer’s (1990, 55) assertion that untriggered forms ‘are not anaphors at all, but, rather, alternative forms of personal pronouns’. Whilst Hernández sources some of her examples from corpora, such as the BNC, her paper mostly focuses on acceptability tests for untriggered forms in so-called picture NPs, such as ‘He thought your pictures of you/yourself were awful’ (2015, 63), with 42 of her 67 participants showing a preference for the reflexive in this particular example.

Considering potential language-external constraints on the use of untriggered reflexives, Hernández (2015) argues that such forms are above the level of public consciousness. This assertion appears to hold true. For example, searching modern prescriptive grammar guides, such as Taggart’s (2010) *Her Ladyship’s Guide to the Queen’s English* (a somewhat tongue-in-cheek text, which is endorsed by the National Trust) and popular prescriptive blog Grammar Girl’s *Quick and Dirty Tips* (Fogarty 2007), guidance to ‘correct’ what is ‘wrong’ with the use of untriggered reflexives is easily found. Writing in the *Chicago Tribune* Stevens (2012) argues that ‘If the misuse of "I" and "me" is an irritant, the abuse of "myself" is nothing short of a blot on humanity’ and quotes an editor of the *American Heritage Dictionary* as saying ‘It points to the fact that you’ve got anxiety about sounding correct and are going out of your way to avoid saying something wrong that isn’t actually wrong’. In the UK, Taggart (2010) labels untriggered reflexives ‘the estate agent’s pronoun’ explained and evaluated as ‘the misuse of

emphatic pronouns'. These statements do not allude, necessarily, to the syntactic rules flouted by untriggered reflexives, nor do they consider why their usage is (allegedly) so widespread. However, they do, as most prescriptive texts do, equate the evaluation of a particular linguistic form with its users. The conceptualisation of untriggered reflexives as something that 'just sounds awful' (Stevens 2012) for example, acts to pass judgement not on the alleged ungrammaticality of untriggered reflexives, but (implicitly) on the people using such forms.

What is significant about such prescriptive judgements is that the authors take an authoritative stance on what is 'correct'. It could be that others (speakers of different dialects, perhaps) would have a different understanding or preferred reading of untriggered reflexive pronouns. Indeed, some of the examples given by Parker, Riley and Meyer (1990) as 'acceptable', such as 'This is a photograph of myself about five years ago' (1990, 51) may be considered unacceptable by other speakers. They also argue, as noted above, that untriggered reflexives are 'relatively more acceptable in the first and second person' (1990, 51), but give no indication as to whom judges such acceptability. As such, this chapter addresses two shortcomings of existing debates about untriggered reflexive pronouns: it draws on corpus analysis of attested language data, and it makes no judgements about the social acceptability of non-standard usage.

The focus of this chapter is not to debate the relative contributions of syntactic and discourse-pragmatic constraints on untriggered reflexives, but rather it provides a snap-shot of how untriggered reflexives are used in spoken British English in the twenty-first century. Through considering the syntactic environments and social distribution of untriggered reflexives, it may be possible to observe constraining factors which have, hitherto, been unanalysed. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

1. Do untriggered reflexives occur in particular syntactic positions?

2. Does the use of untriggered reflexives correlate with grammatical person?
3. Does the use of untriggered reflexives correlate with particular socio-demographic groups (age, sex, etc.)?

3. Methodology: Corpus approaches to pronouns

Paterson (2014) and Siemund (2010) have shown the fruitfulness of analysing pronouns using corpora. The former considered epicene (gender-neutral) pronouns in the BE06 corpus (Baker 2009), whilst the latter used the original BNC to investigate the functions of the reflexive pronoun *itself*. Unfortunately Siemund (2010) does not consider untriggered reflexives, but Lederer (2013) gets somewhat closer, using the BNC to analyse occurrences of reflexives in prepositional phrases (PP).⁴ She argues that some PPs appear to be able to take either a reflexive or a personal pronoun and remain grammatical. For example, she cites the sentence ‘John pulled the blanket over himself/him’ (from Kuno 1987, 66) where it appears that either *him* or *himself* can be coreferent with the NP *John* (Lederer 2013, 484). Lederer notes that current theories suggest that prepositions act as ‘shielding’ for the pronoun which means that usual grammatical constraints do not apply, but notes that there is, as yet, no model which explains ‘what linguistic factors dictate the choice of pronoun’ in such situations, especially considering that syntactic models do not account for the semantic value of prepositions (2013, 484).

Moving beyond a focus on reflexives occurring in PPs, Hernández (2012) analysed the distribution of (reflexive) pronouns in the Freiberg Corpus of English Dialects. In particular, her work demonstrates the usefulness of speaker metadata for highlighting patterns in pronoun choice across different social demographics. However, the Freiberg corpus contains spoken texts from the 1970s and 1980s and thus her analysis cannot shed light on present-day reflexive usage. Furthermore, the Freiberg data comprises face-to-face interviews, which could have

⁴ See also Kjellmer et al. (2004) for an analysis of second-person *-self* forms.

influenced the linguistic forms used by speakers. In contrast, the BNC2014 EAS comprises mostly informal conversation between multiple parties with existing relationships.⁵

To investigate the form and distribution of untriggered reflexive pronouns in the spoken BNC2014 EAS, the following tag-based query was used to extract all relevant pronouns: (_PPX1|_PPX2|_PNX1). The tag _PPX1 returned all singular reflexive pronouns, _PPX2 returned the plurals, and _PNX1 would have returned the indefinite reflexive *oneself*, but this form does not occur in the corpus. Using a tag-based query, rather than a lexical query, meant that non-standard forms of the reflexive pronouns, such as *hissen* and *meself*, were also returned in the query results. The queries returned a total of 2825 hits and the concordance lines for all tokens were downloaded with 50 words either side for context.

As this chapter is only concerned with untriggered reflexives, the query hits were manually coded using a five-way system: i) triggered reflexives, ii) elided/implied triggered reflexives (where the co-referent NP is recoverable, see example 8), iii) self-intensifiers, iv) untriggered reflexives, and v) unclear/other, the latter of which tended to be used when the speech was disjointed or interrupted. The 2825 hits included triggered reflexives (7, 8), self-intensifiers (9, 10), and untriggered reflexives (11).

7) [IP I_i find myself_i at a loose end] (BNCAJT017)

8) [IP help yourself] = [IP you_i help yourself_i] (BNCAP009)

9) [IP he_i himself_i went to boarding school] (BNCHS018)

10) [IP you_i were a child yourself_i] (BNCKH001)

11) [IP you_i should not think of themselves*_{i/j}] (BNCBE010)

⁵ One other difference between Hernández's work and the analysis presented below is that the current chapter does not consider occasions when reflexives would be expected, but personal pronouns occur instead, as in, 'I put a rope round me' (2012, 123).

Self-intensifiers (7, 8), which have historically been labelled as ‘emphatic’ or ‘intensive’ reflexives, ‘reinforcing pronouns’, ‘focus particles’, and ‘scalar adverbs’ (Gast and Siemund 2006, 346-7) are a subtype of triggered reflexives. As such, they are not considered in detail here. The distribution of types of reflexives is given in Table 1.⁶

Table 1: Distribution of all query tokens

	Triggered	Elided/Implied Trigger	Self-intensifier	Untriggered	Unclear	Total per person
1st person						
Myself	593	53	89	30	14	913 (32.32%)
Meself/Mes(s)en	12	1	2			
Oursel	3				1	
Ourselves	102	6	4		3	
2nd person						
Yourself	514	200	27	16	15	795 (28.14%)
Yourselves	7	9	1	3		
Yoursen/Youself	3					
3rd person						
Hersel	165	12	14	3	1	1117 (39.54%)
Himself	269	25	35	2	4	
Hissel	1	1				
Themsel	8		3			
Theirsel			1		10	
Itself	124	6	79	1		
Themselves	287	20	37	2	6	
Theirselves	1					
Total per type	2089 (73.95%)	333 (11.79%)	292 (10.34%)	57 (2.02%)	54 (1.91%)	

The spread in Table 1 is expected, with triggered and elided/implied triggered reflexives making up the majority (85.74%) of the query hits. Self-intensifiers account for 10.34% of the data, whilst untriggered reflexives make up 2.02%, in the form of 57 raw tokens. The analysis primarily focuses on these untriggered reflexives, but briefly considers their distribution relative to the triggered forms in section 4.1. Whilst the number of untriggered reflexives is quite low, this is unsurprising, as forms which obey binding theory were expected to dominate in the corpus. Further explanation for the relatively small number of tokens comes from their proscription in grammar guides (discussed above) and evidence that they are above the level

⁶ Raw frequencies are used here to provide a snapshot of the types of reflexives used across the whole corpus. Normalised frequencies are used elsewhere to make data subdivided by social characteristics comparable.

of public consciousness. Nevertheless, the 57 tokens demonstrate that untriggered reflexives occur in spontaneous spoken data, and their number facilitates close analysis of their syntactic distribution, their potential correlation with socio-demographic variables, and their use within a wider conversational context.

4. Analysis

The analysis of untriggered reflexive pronouns is approached bi-directionally. First, the syntactic profile and grammatical person/number preferences of untriggered reflexives are analysed and it is established that the data presented here is similar in form and syntactic distribution to previously-examined corpora – particularly the sub-corpus analysed by Hernández (2012). Thus, despite the limited number of tokens, claims can be made about general trends in the use of untriggered reflexives. Having established that the data is viable, the analysis then takes a sociolinguistic approach to determine whether the use of untriggered reflexive pronouns correlates with socio-demographic variables, such as age, sex, and location (as provided in the speaker metadata). This second part of the analysis aims to identify whether there is evidence of social constraints on the use of untriggered reflexive pronouns.

Table 2 shows that the untriggered reflexives in BNC2014 EAS occur mainly in the first-person singular, with second-person singular forms being the next most-frequent. The former has a normalised frequency of 6.23 occurrences per million words, whilst the latter has a normalised frequency of just over half of that: 3.34 per million words for second-person singular *yourself*. All the other forms are extremely rare, occurring less than once per million words. The least-frequent untriggered reflexive is the third-person neutral singular *itself*, which occurs only once in the whole corpus, in the example: ‘it’s a soap but it has a certain butteriness buttery uh mayonnaisy sort of element to itself’. No non-standard pronouns occurred as untriggered reflexives and there is no preference for untriggered reflexives to be masculine- or feminine-

marked in the third-person singular (although, due to small numbers, no wider claims can be made about grammatical gender preferences).

Table 2: Distribution untriggered reflexives

	No. (%)	Normalised freq. pmw	No. of speakers	No. of texts
Myself	30 (52.63)	6.26	22	26
Yourself	16 (28.07)	3.34	15	13
Yourselves	3 (5.26)	0.63	3	3
Herself	3 (5.26)	0.63	3	3
Himself	2 (3.51)	0.42	2	2
Itself	1 (1.75)	0.21	1	1
Themselves	2 (3.51)	0.42	2	2
TOTAL	57	11.90		50

Table 2 also includes information about the number of speakers using each untriggered reflexive, as well as the number of texts within which they occur. The data shows that the untriggered forms did not cluster in a small number of texts, nor were a subset of speakers responsible for extremely large token counts. Seven texts included more than one untriggered reflexive, and ten speakers produced more than one token. There are 38 unique speakers in total, with some producing more than one type of untriggered reflexive: the most prolific speaker produced nine tokens, including *myself*, *itself*, and *yourself*, demonstrating that they use such pronouns across all persons. The nuances of different speakers are considered in section 4.2. But first, section 4.1 focuses on syntax.

4.1 Syntactic patterns and grammatical persons

Based on the data presented in Table 2, there is a clear preference for first-person untriggered reflexive pronouns: *myself* accounts for over half (52.63%) of the untriggered reflexives in the whole corpus. This is unexpected, given that first-person forms account for just 32.32% of all reflexives (see Table 1) and 35.02% of all pronouns (personal and reflexive) in the corpus. Close analysis of the first-person untriggered forms indicates that a large portion occurred in one particular syntactic environment: 13 of the 30 tokens of *myself* were either preceded by (8

tokens) or immediately followed by (5 tokens) a coordinating conjunction, as shown in (12) and (13). There were also 3 cases where untriggered *myself* occurred in a list (14).

(12) he's got a long list of things he wants to know about –ANON-name-f and *myself*

(BNCRW021)

(13) there was a group of us er *myself* and my friends (BNCRW016)

(14) she arranged for a personal shopping experience for herself, *myself*, and –ANON-name-f (BNCTCM011)

Such findings are similar to those reported elsewhere. For example, Hernández (2012, 127) found that untriggered *myself* occurs as a subject with coordinated forms (e.g. Lisa and myself) more than any other untriggered reflexive.⁷

To investigate whether the co-occurrence of coordinating conjunctions and untriggered reflexives was specific to untriggered forms or representative of wider trends in pronoun use the BNC2014 EAS was queried for all personal pronouns occurring as L1/R1 to a coordinating conjunction, which was preceded or followed by another personal pronoun/proper noun. There were 2619 hits including *me and you*, --ANON-name-m and *I*, *she and* –ANON-name-f, etc. Taking an automatically-thinned set of 100 hits showed that such constructions occur 56% of the time across clause boundaries, 19% were subjects of a clause, 4% were objects, 5% complements, 1% adjuncts, and 15% were unclear (due to disfluency, repetition, interruption, or split utterances). Comparing this to the 18 untriggered reflexives occurring in immediate proximity to coordinating conjunctions (13 *myself*, 3 *herself*, and 2 *yourself*), 11.11% occurred

⁷ Parker, Riley and Meyer (1990, 54) argue that untriggered reflexives occur in NPs linked by coordinating conjunctions because case assignment (relating to the c-commanding NP) is 'blocked in coordinate constructions', and thus any pronoun can occur in such constructions. They claim that 'normal rules of case assignment are relaxed in coordinate structures because an intervening NP serves as a barrier to government' and, therefore, untriggered reflexives occurring in this position are 'not anaphors, but, rather, personal pronouns' (1990, 56). However, if this were true, there would be no preference for a particular pronoun form – speakers/writers would be just as likely to use *me*, *myself*, or *I* in such constructions, which does not appear to be the case.

at a clause boundary, 27.78% were subjects, 22.22% were objects, 22.22% were complements, there was one adjunct (5.56%), and 11.11% were unclear. Although we are dealing with small numbers, there does seem to be a preference for untriggered reflexives to occur in object and complement positions more often than would be expected based on the thinned sample of personal pronouns, and they are also much less likely to occur at a clause boundary.

Similarly to Hernández's (2012) research, the first-person untriggered forms occur as coordinated subjects more than any other untriggered form. All other reflexive forms (triggered, elided/implied triggered, and self-intensifiers) in BNC2014 EAS only co-occurred with coordinating conjunctions at a clause boundary.⁸ In her sub-corpus of 1.5 million words of the Freiberg Corpus of English Dialects, Hernández (2012) also found 24 untriggered reflexives in prepositional complements and notes that 'more than half' of the untriggered reflexives occurring in PPs in her data 'form part of comparisons' (2012, 138). In the BNC2014 EAS there are 31 (54.39%) untriggered reflexives occurring immediately after prepositions (in both complement and adjunct positions). They occur across all persons and numbers, most frequently occurring with *for* (6 tokens) and *of* (6 tokens). These include 7 comparisons (*like* occurs 6 times and *as* occurs once), which cluster in the second-person (4 *yourself/selves*) alongside 3 tokens of *myself*. Therefore, it seems that, despite Hernández's corpus containing data from the late twentieth-century, there are clear parallels in the syntactic patterns found in her data and in the BNC2014 EAS. This provides some initial evidence that the occurrence and distribution of untriggered reflexives is relatively stable in British English.

⁸ Triggered reflexives showed a tendency to occur in by-phrases (*by myself, by yourselves*) and elided/implied triggers occurred as the object in imperatives, such as *help yourself* and *control yourself*.

Returning to trends in grammatical persons, the second-person forms accounted for a total of 33.33% of the untriggered tokens. Such preferences for first- and second-person forms could be seen as evidence for Parker, Riley and Meyer's (1990, 51) claims that untriggered reflexives are more acceptable in these grammatical persons. However, one must be careful not to overstate the case. The dialogic spoken nature of the data likely increased the use of first- and second-person pronouns. Whilst the analysis has shown, proportionally, that first- and second-person reflexives are more common, this does not equate to them being more 'acceptable'. None of the untriggered forms in the corpus are directly challenged by other conversational participants, nor are any of the speakers corrected by reiteration (where another speaker repeats an utterance containing an untriggered reflexive and replaces it with a personal pronoun). As such, the data cannot directly tell us about the (social) acceptability of such forms. However, what is apparent from the wider context of each untriggered reflexive is that their use did not cause any confusion or misunderstanding between speakers; the real-world referent of the untriggered form is understood. Therefore, a general level of 'acceptability' can be proposed, even if the use of untriggered reflexive pronouns does not conform to syntactic norms.

It is also notable in Table 2 that the second-person untriggered reflexives are dominated by 16 tokens of singular-marked *yourself*. This trend for the singular occurs across all persons; there are no occurrences of plurals in the first-person and only two third-person tokens are plural. However, singular forms represent 82.54% of all *-self* forms (triggered, implied, and self-intensifiers) and are most frequent in all grammatical persons (87.05% of first-person tokens, 97.77% of second-person tokens, and 68.27% of third-person tokens). Thus it seems that untriggered reflexives (of which 91.21% were singular) follow a similar pattern in terms of grammatical number to all *-self* forms, and thus the preference for singular forms is not unique to untriggered forms.

Whilst the majority of the untriggered reflexives conform to established patterns, such as co-occurrence with coordinating conjunctions, use in comparisons, etc., there were 10 tokens which did not fit into established categories. These included two tokens where the untriggered reflexive was a single-word utterance; *yourself* was used when two speakers were collaboratively making a list and *myself* was used as an attempt to initiate a speaker change. A further seven tokens were the object of a verb, but not part of a PP (15-17).

15) it's providing *yourself* the best possible foundation (BNCRW011)

16) the person who is giving *yourself* a bad you know perception (BNCAP007)

17) little jokes that maybe make *yourself* feel better (BNCAS006)

The final token ('even *myself*') was used to frame a sentence and acts as a complex subject. Furthermore, whilst the syntactic patterns and rate of occurrence of untriggered reflexives in the present corpus is similar to that found in previous corpus-based studies, it is important to note where datasets differ. For example, there are no occurrences in the BNC2014 EAS of the picture NPs tested by Hernández (2015) as discussed in section 2. However, there are clearly common trends between the present data and those presented by Hernández (2012), which suggests that the BNC2014 EAS is not anomalous and can, at least in a limited capacity, be taken as representative of wider syntactic trends. Having established that syntactic patterning of untriggered reflexives, the analysis now considers potential sociolinguistic constraints.

4.2 Demographic groups and language change

One of the benefits of focusing on attested data instead of introspective examples is that analysis of untriggered reflexives can also include a detailed consideration of the wider context (and co-text) of their production. To this end, Table 3 shows the distribution of the 57 untriggered reflexives based on the socio-demographic profiles of their speakers. Each row represents a location, the columns represent the social classes A-E, and the male/female split

is given either side of the slash, i.e. 1/0 denotes one token produced by a male and zero tokens produced by a female. The social grade system of social class was used for coding and NS-SEC data was added retrospectively.⁹ However, as discussed below, it was actually links to education (employment as a teacher/lecturer, or student status), not social class, that correlated with the use of untriggered reflexives.

Table 3: Distribution of untriggered reflexives by location, social class (A-E), & sex (M/F): raw tokens

ALL	A	B	C1	C2	D	E	ALL
East Mid							0
Eastern						0/3	3
Irish	1/0					1/0	2
Liverpool	1/0	2/0					3
London		1/0				1/0	2
Northeast	0/2					0/1	3
Northwest						1/0	1
Scottish							0
Southeast		0/1					1
Southwest							0
West Mid		2/0					2
Welsh							0
Yorkshire						2/1	3
Non-UK	4/0						4
X	9/1	2/13	3/3			0/2	33
SUM	15/3	7/14	3/3	0	0	5/7	57

Table 3 shows that there were no speakers from the East Midlands, the Southwest, Scotland, or Wales, who used untriggered reflexives. In fact, the majority of tokens (33), were produced by speakers who did not provide sufficient information about their location to facilitate classification at the regional level. As such, the only conclusion which can be drawn about the geographical spread of untriggered reflexives is that their use does not appear to correlate with a particular location and/or a geographically-located dialect. Even when consulting the speaker metadata for those uncategorised by location (category X), information provided about their

⁹ NS-SEC is the National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification, which uses forms of employment (typically job titles) to categorise people into different socioeconomic brackets. For the BNC2014 EAS the NS-SEC was mapped onto the social grade (A-E) model of social class used here.

dialect and place of birth, suggest that location does not appear to be an important factor affecting the use of untriggered reflexives.

However, the raw figures in Table 3 can only tell us so much. In order to make data from different locations and relating to different social classes and sex comparable, we must acknowledge that there are different amounts of speech in the subsections of the corpus. Therefore, the figures have been normalised to tokens per 10,000 words in Table 4 to account for the fact that the corpus is not balanced in terms of social characteristics (such as social class, sex, or location).

Table 4: Distribution of untriggered reflexives by location/social class (A-E) and sex (M/F) – normalised

ALL	A	B	C1	C2	D	E	ALL
East Mid							0
Eastern						0/0.47	0.079
Irish	9.82/0					11.60/0	1.604
Liverpool	7.23/0	2.27/0					0.258
London		0.54/0				0.54/0	0.106
Northeast	0/0.16					0/0.44	0.094
Northwest						0.52/0	0.064
Scottish							0
Southeast		0/0.08					0.046
Southwest							0
West Mid		0.41/0					0.340
Welsh							0
Yorkshire						0.21/0.11	0.063
Non-UK	0.85/0						0.648
X	0.18/0.03	0.18/0.18	0.20/0.10			0/0.08	0.123
SUM	0.308/0.046	0.055/0.110	0.118/0.081	0	0	0.080/0.115	57

Normalising the frequencies indicates that there are some geographical areas more associated with untriggered reflexives than others. In particular, Ireland shows the strongest trends towards the use of untriggered reflexives (although we must be aware that these figures were generated based on 2 raw tokens). Thus there is scope for future research on the use of untriggered reflexives in Irish English, but no firm conclusions can be drawn based on the

BNC2014 EAS. The normalised data for Liverpool also indicates that there could be a preference for untriggered reflexives, as they occurred at rates of 7.23 and 2.27 per million in social classes A and B. However, there were only two raw tokens of untriggered reflexives in Liverpool and when all the Liverpool-based speech in the corpus is taken into account, the normalised figure drops to 0.258 tokens per 10,000 words. This suggests that social class may play more of a role in the use of untriggered reflexives than geographical location. Overall, therefore, normalisation of the tokens of untriggered reflexives demonstrates that there is no overwhelming correlation with their use and speaker geography.

The sum row of Table 4 also shows that there does, however, seem to be some limited correlation between the use of untriggered reflexives and sex. Men in social grade A appear to use the form the most, followed by men in the C1 category, whilst (for the grades where there is data) women in category A seem to use the form least (followed by women in C1). Thus, not only may there be a sex-based correlation, there is more evidence for a corresponding social class correlation (see below). Overall, the normalised frequencies for all male and all female speakers' use of untriggered reflexives are 0.157, and 0.094 per 10,000 words respectively, which suggests that men produce the form 1.6 times as much as women. However, Table 4 does not account for speakers who produced multiple tokens of untriggered reflexives. There were six men and four women who produced multiple tokens, comprising a subset of the 23 male speakers and 15 female speakers who used untriggered reflexives overall. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that the men in the BNC2014 EAS were more likely to use such forms than women. Drawing loosely on historical variationist sociolinguistics (c.f. Trudgill 1974) and wide generalisations about men and women's use of language, it would therefore be predicted that untriggered reflexives are non-standard, and, indeed, this is the case.

Table 4 indicates that there are no speakers in social classes C and D using untriggered reflexives. However, social classes A and B, which include speakers classified as working in higher/intermediate managerial positions as well as some professional occupations, account for 39 (68.42%) of the untriggered reflexives. Whilst using employment (status) as a proxy for social class is problematic, it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to address such issues in detail. However, it is noted that use of particular linguistic features (particularly prestigious variants) may correlate with educational background and, furthermore, that there is likely to be a higher proportion of people with high levels of education in social classes A and B compared with classes C and D.¹⁰ Indeed, an analysis of speaker metadata indicates that 12 (31.58%) speakers who used untriggered reflexives work or have worked in education (two are retired teachers), including two who specifically note that they teach English language. There are a further 7 (18.42%) speakers currently in education, as stated in the individual speaker metadata, who are classified in group E. These 19 speakers are responsible for 33 (57.89%) of the untriggered reflexives in the BNC2014 EAS.

One could interpret Tables 3 and 4 as demonstrating that untriggered reflexives are associated with higher social classes, and thus they could potentially be a prestige variant (c.f. Labov 1972). However, due to issues of grammaticality, combined with the negative evaluation of untriggered reflexives in prescriptive texts (see section 2), this seems unlikely. A further potential explanation is that the use of untriggered reflexives is influenced by the relative rarity of all reflexive forms (in comparison to personal pronouns) and speakers' awareness that the (mis)use of untriggered reflexives is above the level of public consciousness.¹¹ Indeed, the use

¹⁰ Class E includes people who are retired from all professions and full time students, so claims about overall education levels cannot be made.

¹¹ There may also be some cross-over influence from other pronoun-based prescriptions, such as uncertainty of when to use *I* or *me* in coordinated NPs: 'Thomas and *I* went skiing' vs. '*Me* and Thomas went skiing'. Although testing such an interaction is difficult using corpus data as there is no way to ascertain speakers' awareness of such grammatical norms.

of untriggered reflexives can be linked to the notion of linguistic security. Based on the anecdotal evidence provided by Steve Kleinedler (*American Heritage Dictionary* editor, see Stevens (2012) in section 2) that people use untriggered reflexives due to some form of social anxiety about saying the wrong thing, there is potentially a case for the role of hypercorrection here. By analogy to Meyerhoff's (2011, 180) example, where speakers who predominantly use [ɪn] forms encounter a dialect with [ɪŋ] forms and are 'at a loss at where to put them', it can be argued that, due to their rarity, speakers may be unfamiliar with the grammar of reflexive pronouns and disregard rules of reflexive-antecedent binding.¹² In order to test whether hypercorrection is a factor in speakers' choice of untriggered reflexives, we must consider the wider context of their interactions and move beyond the immediate co-text of their use.

The most prolific user of untriggered reflexives in the corpus is a 41-year-old, British, female teacher, born in Dorchester (henceforth S1), who describes her accent as 'South of England'. S1 produces nine untriggered reflexives in six different texts. The fact that her untriggered forms are not restricted to one conversation or one group of speakers is evidence that untriggered reflexive pronouns are part of her repertoire, and, furthermore, suggest that she was not producing such pronouns in response to a particular stimulus (such as a priming effect caused by another speaker using untriggered reflexives). A potential exception to this is S2, a 41-year-old, male entrepreneur, with dual UK/New Zealand heritage, who produces two tokens of *yourself* directed at S1. However, S1 does not reciprocate. She produces only one token of *myself* in conversation with S2 and analysis of the wider discourse indicates that this token does not occur within ten utterances either side of S2's use of untriggered reflexives. Potentially, S1's usage has influenced S2, and indeed S2 is a participant in 14 other texts

¹² Further anecdotal evidence for this claim is that performing an internet search for 'when to use *myself*' results in 359 million hits.

(alongside S1) where neither of them produce untriggered reflexive pronouns. However, based on the limited metadata we have about these two speakers, there are no grounds to suggest that S1's position in their relationship (they are a couple) could influence S2 any more than S2 could influence S1. It appears then that data cannot provide direct evidence for or against the argument that hypercorrection plays a role in reflexive pronoun use. Furthermore, there is no overt discussion of (reflexive) pronoun choice in the BNC2014 EAS.

Table 5 demonstrates that there is a slight pattern in age preferences. Figures have been normalised to per 10,000 words in Table 6, which shows that rates of untriggered reflexives rise from 11-18 to 19-29, but decrease for those aged 30-39, before peaking between 40-49 and tapering off as the age of speakers increases. The peak in the age-graded data is worthy of further investigation in a larger dataset, although it is worth noting here, that these figures are inflated by the speech of S1 (discussed above).

Table 5: Distribution untriggered reflexives by age: raw tokens

	11_18	19_29	30_39	40_49	50_59	60_69	70_79	80_89	90_99	X
Myself	1	8		9	3	7		2		
Yourself		9	3	4						
Yourselves		1			1					1
Herself		2		1						
Himself		1		1						
Itself			1							
Themselves			1	1						
Tokens	1	21	5	16	4	7	0	2	0	1
Speakers	1	16	3	7	3	5	0	2	0	1

Table 6: Distribution untriggered reflexives by age: normalised

	11_18	19_29	30_39	40_49	50_59	60_69	70_79	80_89	90_99	X
Myself	0.052	0.041		0.194	0.080	0.112		0.444		
Yourself		0.046	0.036	0.086						
Yourselves		0.005			0.027					0.348
Herself		0.010		0.022						
Himself		0.005		0.022						
Itself			0.012							
Themselves			0.012	0.022						
SUM	0.052	0.107	0.060	0.346	0.106	0.112	0	0.444	0	0.348

The pattern in Table 6 is similar (although slightly condensed) to the u-curve pattern discussed by Llamas (2007, 73). Llamas argues that this pattern, where non-standard forms decrease during adult working age and then rise again in older age groups, is typical of a linguistic variable which is stable and not undergoing any form of language change. Removing S1's tokens of untriggered reflexives means that the u-cure pattern discussed by Llamas maps more neatly onto Table 6. Furthermore, when plotting speakers, not tokens (see Table 5), the pattern in untriggered reflexive use is flattened, but still follows a similar trend.

Further evidence that untriggered reflexives are relatively stable is the fact that their occurrence has not dramatically increased/decreased between the 1970/80s data analysed by Hernández (2012) and the BNC2014 EAS. However, the question that remains is whether there is a particular force influencing the production of untriggered reflexive pronouns. To this end, the analysis concludes by focusing on the most-used untriggered reflexive, *myself*. Of the 30 occurrences of untriggered *myself*, 8 are used to emphasise that the speaker is part of a larger social group who were performing a collective action, playing roles in the same narrative, or affected by someone else's action (18, 19). S1 uses untriggered *myself* to emphasise similarity between herself and others; 'people like *myself*' and 'someone like *myself*' (which occurs twice) conveys that S1 is not alone in their opinion on a given topic.

18) he wants to know about –ANON-name-m and *myself* (BNCRW021)

19) it was mum and dad and aunt and unc- and *myself* (BNCCB018)

20) deposits made by *myself* (BNCAJT018)

21) I think it tastes good for *myself* (BNCAP008)

There is one use of *myself* which acts as an (unsuccessful) attempt to keep the conversational floor, and two tokens are used in an attempt to take the floor, interrupting the previous speaker (only one is successful). The use of untriggered reflexives in these circumstances indicate that

the speaker wishes to talk particularly about themselves; the alternative – personal pronoun *I* – does not provide such information about the topic of discourse to the addressees in the same way. Additional foregrounding of self-hood occurs in (20) where the speaker emphasises that only they could make legitimate deposits into a bank account, and (21) where the speaker is discussing how their evaluation of their own baking may be different to others' evaluations.

However, there is also some evidence that *myself* is used in its untriggered form to suggest disassociation between the speaker and the real-world referent. For example, (22) constructs one's own inner monologue as different to and separate from one's self. Despite logic dictating that the speaker and their 'inner voice' are inextricably linked, the use of *myself*, as well as the definite article (*the* inner voice, not *my* inner voice), suggests that the 'inner voice' can act somewhat independently of the speaker.

22) the internal voice that makes excuses for *myself* (BNCJB006)

Whilst there are too few tokens to make wide-reaching claims about the discourse function of the use of untriggered reflexives, it is notable that some loose patterns occurred across the 30 tokens of *myself*. This demonstrates that use of untriggered reflexives is not random, but determining the wider social constraints on their use requires further study and more examples. Finally, there are no instances in the corpus where the real-world referent of an untriggered reflexive is unclear; they are always understood by the addressees and cause no ambiguity. Thus, despite arguments that they are ungrammatical (both in a syntactic and prescriptive sense) addressees can assign referents to untriggered reflexive pronouns.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The headline conclusion is that the vast majority (90%) of 380 speakers in the BNC2014 EAS did not produce untriggered reflexive pronouns. Despite arguments that such forms appear to be above the level of public consciousness, appearing in popular prescriptive grammar guides

(c.f. Taggart 2010), evidence from the present analysis, and other corpus-based work (c.f. Hernández 2012; Lederer 2013), suggests that untriggered reflexives are extremely rare. Only 10 speakers produced more than one token of such pronouns, with 8 of these producing just 2 tokens each. The untriggered reflexives account for only 2.02% of the reflexive pronouns in the BNC2014 EAS, and reflexive pronouns account for only 0.43% of the total number of personal and reflexive pronouns in the corpus. This means that the 57 tokens of untriggered reflexive pronouns represent only 0.0086% of all 660,541 (personal and reflexive) pronouns. Nevertheless, the occurrence of 57 tokens facilitated the close analysis of untriggered reflexives, which focused on their syntactic distribution and the wider context of their use.

To address the research questions, untriggered reflexives do seem to cluster in particular syntactic environments, particularly in PPs and coordinated NPs. Untriggered reflexives were rarely subjects, but this was to be expected based on the limited pre-existing corpus-based research. There was a preference for first-person forms, and second-person forms were more frequent than third-person forms. No grammatical gender-marking trend was observed, but there were too few third-person tokens to make any wider claims. The majority of the untriggered forms in the corpus were singular, but this reflected general patterns in pronoun use and was not a phenomenon restricted to untriggered reflexives. Nevertheless, a consideration of the surrounding context of instances of untriggered *myself* indicated that the prevalence of singular untriggered reflexives may be explained from a pragmatic perspective, insofar as they reinforce the individuality (the self-hood) of the speaker and foreground it as the topic of discourse.

In terms of socio-demographic variables, there was no strong correlation apparent in terms of location and/or dialects. There is evidence that men use untriggered reflexives more frequently

than women, although the most prolific user of untriggered forms was female. (In a wider sense, however, questions can be asked about the validity of such a gender binary and the attribution of linguistic features to particular homogenised groups based on sex.) Untriggered forms appeared to cluster in higher social classes and amongst those involved with education (although it is notable that speakers ranged from high-school students to PhD students and teachers). In order to explain the fact that untriggered forms were produced by 19 speakers with direct links to education, the notions of linguistic security and hypercorrection were introduced. However, there was not enough information in the speaker metadata, nor was there any overt discussion of reflexive pronouns, which could point to a firm conclusion about the potential role played by hypercorrection. Even reading large sections of each text, one can only assume the (socially-motivated) reasons for speakers using untriggered reflexive pronouns. Analysis of the final social variable, age, suggested that untriggered reflexives were a fairly stable linguistic phenomenon, a conclusion which is supported by the parallels between the present dataset and Hernández's (2012) work on the Freiberg Corpus of English Dialects.

Finally, the analysis turned to the discourse-level in order to determine whether there were any discernible patterns in the discursive function of untriggered reflexives. Focusing on *myself* it was encouraging that potential trends, such as the foregrounding of self-hood and the use of untriggered reflexives to emphasise a speakers' affiliation with larger social groups, were apparent. However, one caveat is that the aim of the preceding analysis was not to determine individual speakers' intent based on the pronouns they produced. But rather it aimed to establish whether there are any similarities in interactions which could explain the presence of untriggered reflexives. In order to more-fully understand *why* speakers use untriggered reflexives, corpus analysis must be supplemented by alternative methods of data collection and analyses that directly involve those producing the pronouns, such as interviews with the

speakers, or having them undertake grammatical acceptability tests. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter, due to the anonymity of contributors to BNC2014, but is certainly an avenue for potential future study.

What this chapter has shown, however, is that untriggered reflexive pronouns are rather rare in spontaneous speech. They have an overall normalised frequency of 11.90 per million words in the BNC2014 EAS. As such, obtaining enough tokens for detailed close analysis or to inform statistical calculations is problematic. Thus, drawing on extremely large corpora (as opposed to other techniques such as elicitation test) seems a sensible way to collect tokens of untriggered reflexives from naturally occurring data, although the type of social interactions captured within a corpus must be taken into account. Given that untriggered reflexives are conceptualised as above the level of public consciousness, it can be posited that they may occur more frequently in situations where there is a clear power hierarchy between speakers. The informal nature of the recordings in BNC2014 EAS, and the apparent close relationships between speakers (S1 and S2 were a couple, for example) may mean that speakers were less concerned with apparent ‘correctness’ in their choice of reflexive pronouns. They may also have been less inclined to hypercorrect. To investigate the role of social power and context further, it would be useful to compare the use of untriggered reflexives across spoken corpora in which speaker relationships were different. For example, the results presented here could be contrasted with the more formal work-related talk in the original spoken BNC. Nevertheless, despite the limitations noted above, the analysis of the BNC2014 EAS has demonstrated that untriggered reflexive pronouns are an (albeit rare) feature of 21st century spoken British English and their occurrence persists despite opposition from prescriptive sources.

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