

'Override' reflexives in Danish and English

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It is somewhat surprising that English allows (1a,b) (where underlining indicates co-reference):

- (1) En. a. Peter's behaviour only hurts himself.
b. Peter doesn't realise that such behaviour only hurts himself.

even though *himself* does not refer to the subject of the same clause (which is *Peter's behaviour* and *such behaviour* respectively). This is surprising because far from all clauses allow *himself* to refer to something else than the subject of the same clause:

- (2) En. a. *Peter's sister only criticised himself.
b. *Peter does not realise that Joan only criticised himself.

This is why *himself* in (1a,b) is often called an 'override reflexive' or an 'untriggered reflexive'.

Our analysis is that 'override' reflexives are the result of the combination of the non-reflexive pronoun *him* with the intensifier *himself*, and that this combination is subsequently 'shortened' from *him himself* to *himself*.

This analysis is also completely compatible with the data from Danish, where the combination of the corresponding pronoun *ham* with the corresponding intensifier *selv* is not subject to 'shortening', and the result is therefore *ham selv*:

- (3) Da. a. Peters opførsel skader bare ham selv. ≈ (1a)
b. Peter indser slet ikke at sådan en opførsel bare skader ham selv. ≈ (1b)

This talk will try to show how the fact that Danish has two versions of *ham selv* and that English has two versions of *himself* fits into the general reflexive systems of the two languages. The analyses will be held up against data from three large and publically accessible corpora (Danish: *KorpusDK*; English: *BNC* and *COCA*).