Reflexives: We don’t see the Attraction
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Question
Do we observe uniform intrusion profiles for agreement and reflexives?

Intrusion & Cue-Based Retrieval
Cue-based models of sentence processing [1-3] lead us to a *priori* expect that verb agreement and reflexive pronouns should be similarly prone to intrusion effects.

| The key to the doors really are... |
| NOM | PL |
| SG  |
| Tom said that Mary pricked himself... |
| LOCAL | NOM |
| MASC |

However, previous work finds strong intrusion effects for agreement, but not for reflexives:
* Many studies find “agreement attraction” effects [4-7]
* Very few studies report an analogous grammatical illusion for reflexive pronouns [7-11; c.f.12-14]
* A direct comparison of agreement and reflexives, Dillon et al. (2013) found no intrusion effects for reflexives, but substantial effects for agreement.

(1) The tall nurse who cared for the elderly widows definitely... were reluctant to work long shifts, pricked themselves with a used syringe.

The Present Study
Previous work may have unintentionally biased against finding intrusion with reflexives. We aim to maximize the likelihood of finding intrusion effects for both dependencies.
* The position of the intruder was chosen to maximize the rate of attraction [4]
* The critical and spillover regions were standardized for best comparison [c.f. 7]
* We focus on intrusion from plural nouns, which are known to exert stronger attraction effects [5]
* Materials were normed to ensure that intruders could act as felicitous antecedents for the reflexive

Materials and Methods
* 64 UMass undergraduates participated in an eye-tracking while reading study
* Materials were 48 sentence sets like (2)
* Tested a gram × intruder × dependency interaction using LME with de-correlated slopes and intercepts for subjects and items

References

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Hypothesis: Agreement and reflexives represent distinct processes

Stimuli: grammaticality × intrusion × dependency

(2) The motherly therapist(s) of the widow(s) eventually / were reassured / that the family / was on the road to recovery.

Predictions: How should number attraction affect agreement and reflexives?
* Number Attraction: The penalty for ungrammaticality should be ameliorated by a plural intruder, reducing reading times at the critical region
* Cue-based retrieval: Number attraction effects should be same for agreement and reflexives
* Distinct dependencies: Little to no impact of number attraction on reflexive dependencies

Eyetracking Results

Reflexive Intrusion is Short-lived

• Early number attraction for agreement
• No number attraction for reflexives

Intrusion Effect Analysis

• Main effect of gram disappears for agreement
• Delayed sensitivity to intruder number for reflexives

Summary of Results

In sum, we do find hints of intrusion for reflexives, but it seems to be smaller, less durable, and maybe later, than the one for agreement, suggesting a qualitatively different character.

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Conclusion: Reflexive intrusion is distinct

• Reflexives show trends to intrusion effects, but in a manner distinct from agreement [n.b. 11]
• These findings might still implicate a role for cue-based retrieval, but more work is needed to understand the divergence from agreement
• Our findings also highlight the importance of a carefully chosen spillover region: weak reflexive intrusion effects in previous studies may have been obscured by variation in spillover analyses.