# I Like Myself and Me

# Speaking notes

This paper is concerned with the relative frequencies of the marked and unmarked forms in a range of utterances – the list is in appendix 1.

***OVERHEAD 1***

I won't go into the history of the task, it is all in the handout and will be published on my internet site after the conference.
There is also some information in the handout on the problems of using the Internet as a linguistic corpus, so I won't cover that either.
However, I will emphasise one very important point: In the appendix 1 totals column, figures of under 100 mean that the data is essentially inaccurate.
Because the internet creates its own problems, it only really works for large volumes of data, or for individually assessed occurrences, and the two methods do not mix.

I originally intended to look at the full range of reflexive pronouns but, as most of you will have already spotted, the reflexive nature of pronouns varies with person.
In the third person, there is the probability that the subject is not co-identified with the object; so in *he likes him* the subject *he* is unlikely to be the same person as the object *him*.
Thus reflexion has to be marked by a syntactic flag, the addition of *–self*.

In the second person, it is possible to either separately identify individuals in a receiver-group, or to redefine the receiver in the middle of an utterance.
Thus *you like you* can, through deixis, have a different meaning to *you like yourself*.

Only in the first person does the subject always co-identify with the object.
Thus *I like me* has effectively the same meaning as *I like myself*.

In the plural there is the slight possibility that *we like us* could refer to two different groups containing the sender, but no cases of this were identified in the examples checked.

I was a bit slower on the uptake here than most of you will have been, so I actually did some work on the other reflexive pronouns.
It was, of course, a disaster, so I'll draw a veil over that part of the exercise.

The first data check in September 2001 proved that *I like me* is more common than *I like myself* (this is in appendix 3, the first table).

***OVERHEAD 2***

However, I decided to extend the study to look at the past tense, the plural, and the comparable antithetical statement *I hate me/myself*.
And immediately it became obvious that there was something strange going on.
In none of the cases - except *I like me* - was the grammatically unmarked form in the majority.
The most extreme cases (wrong person, wrong tense) were, unfortunately, statistically insignificant – even the Internet isn't big enough – but the other figures seemed to show that the further you got from *I like me/myself*, the more common was the grammatically marked form.

In February 2002 I did a second check, this time extending the study to include related forms of *love, dislike, don't like* and *do not like* (this is in appendix 3 second table).
This gave a theoretical continuum of meaning – although, it must be stressed, this continuum is not mathematically significant.
This time the tense effect was <u>not</u> tested.
I believed at the time that the tense effect was of less interest, despite the fact that the first exercise showed it to have an almost regular halving effect on the relative frequency of the unmarked form.

At this stage I was somewhat floundering with the data and not at all sure what I was seeing.
Nonetheless, the second check showed the same effect as the first, and gave the additional piece of data that semantic "distance" from *I like me/myself* seemed to affect relative frequencies.

In December 2002 I performed the third check, which combined the features of the first and second checks (this is appendix 1).

***OVERHEAD 1***

The variations were: singular and plural; present tense and past; and the same continuum of meaning as in the February test.
This gave twenty four binomial sets of data.
Once again, the same effects were found as in the first two checks: changing the verb, tense, or number reduced the frequency of the unmarked form.
And changing the verb and tense, or the number and tense, had a cumulative effect.
Once again, changing verb, tense and number gave a statistically insignificant sample.

The figures have been expressed in graph form to make them easier to understand (this is in appendix 2).
Each of the graphs show four series of data.
The numbers on the x axis correspond to the row numbers in appendix one.
So the series of data are: 2 to 7; 9 to 14; 16 to 21; and 23 to 28.

***OVERHEAD 3***

On the first graph, the data appears to show four almost-perfect series of poisson distribution.
This is an artefact of the data: the points in the series are arbitrary and do not represent a mathematical relationship.

If there is any scalar distance between the x axis points, then the distance between *I love me* and *I like me* is not comparable to the distance between *I do not like me* and *I don't like me*.

Because of this the data is actually twenty four binomial distributions between marked and unmarked forms.

Mathematically, the binomial distributions are not comparable; but linguistically, they are.

This gives a problem for analysing the data: if we insist on a mathematically rigorous analysis then the results we can produce are banal.

If, however, we attempt a more free-form analysis then our conclusions will have to be more tentative.

I opted for the second path because, quite frankly, it's more interesting.

The first thing to do is to try to normalise the data.

To do this, the first series (singular present tense) was used as the base.

This is somewhat arbitrary, but it is both the most numerous set and it contains the utterances that started this whole exercise – so it provides a reasonable baseline.

The second task was to predict the outcomes of the other sets of data based on the first baseline set.

So graph 2 shows the distribution that would have occurred if the only variable was the continuum of meaning.

***OVERHEAD 4***

Graph 3 shows the variation between the predicted (graph 2) and the actual (graph 1).

In this graph we can see that the first form, *love*, and the third through fifth forms (*do not like; don't like; dislike*) have notable negative values compared to the positive value of the second, base form, *like*.

There do appear to be separate effects from verb, tense, and number – which cumulatively, and negatively, affect the frequency of the unmarked form.

Graph 4 shows the differences normalised by their totals on an arbitrary average figure of 1000.

This is not quite arbitrary, it represents approximately twice the average total count, but it is certainly not mathematically accurate.
However, it does provide a way of saying graphically, that the data in the fourth set is statistically insignificant.

***OVERHEAD 1***

What could be going on here?
I doubt that there is anything in the formalist canon which could explain this, so I have not looked there for solutions.
In the functionalist area we could be looking at issues in the textual metafunction, or possibly something to do with the logical metafunction.
It could be that the frequency variation in utterances could be a feature of the utterances themselves.
Or it could be to do with the contexts in which they are found.

The logical metafunction is associated with such words as holism and idiom.
They all three express, at some level, the use of a utterance as a standalone agrammatical form.
Although there may be apparent grammar operating within the utterance, the production is unitary – what Alison Wray calls, in another context, "performance without competence."

This was the subject of a survey carried out as part of my MA.
This survey showed that the same utterance can be viewed in different ways by different individuals, so that what, for some, is an idiomatic unit – is, for others, a grammatical composite.
What is more, there seemed to be an individual tendency to view utterances in an idiomatic or grammatical way.
Some people adopted a grammatical approach when it seemed inappropriate, and vice versa.

If *I like me* is being used as an idiom, then what we may be seeing is a "contamination" from the idiomatic form *I like me* into related forms.
As the distance from the original utterance increases, so the idiomatic contamination reduces.
Or, to put it another way, the willingness to use the idiomatic form reduces as the influence of the idiom wanes.
This explanation fits with the facts, and may well be a partial solution.
However; it is unsatisfying as a full solution as it does not include any context-related data.

To address this, the first 100 occurrences of *I like me* and *I like myself* were investigated, to see what their context revealed.
Of the 100 *I like me* occurrences, 79 were stand-alone utterances related to self-help products.
(Of particular significance was someone called Nancy Carlson, but that may be an artefact of the data.)
12 occurrences were standalone comments unrelated to self-help;
7 were embedded in larger utterances (for example, *I like me best with a beard*);
one was a dialect replacement for *my* (*I like me sex on the sharp side*);
and one was elliptical (*I like me some Chris Moore*).

Of the 100 *I like myself* occurrences, only 6 were related to self-help products, and 64 were standalone comments unrelated to self-help.
26 were embedded in larger utterances (for example, *I like myself at this weight*);
and 4 were emphatics (for example, *it's what I like myself*).
Surprisingly, 45 were related to the personal weight of the writer, compared to zero for *I like me*.

Thus there seem to be pragmatic issues involved, too, at least around the *I like me/myself* dichotomy.
Could there actually be a subtle difference in meaning between the two forms?

Anthony Giddens points towards issues of self which are related to the intimate self and a reified external self.

I can see myself as a single entity, with the reflexion back to that single entity, or I can see myself as two entities, with the reflexion moving from one version of me to the other.

It gets more complex, because the internal me is related to the intellectual me, the me that drives the machine;

while the external me is related to the physical me, the machine that is driven.

There is more than a small hint of Cartesian dualism here.

However, this analysis does relate to the *me* that can be liked (the intellectual); and the *myself* that can be weighed (the physical).

Although Lakoff and Johnson don't mention this effect directly, these could be two of the most fundamental metaphors we live by.

If this argument has value then it should be possible to prove it by looking at other utterances and it does seem to be borne out (although not completely).

***OVERHEAD 2***

Appendix 4 shows the context-related data from *I hate me/myself* and *we/like us/ourselves*.

All of the *I hate me* utterances seem to be blanket condemnations of the self, while less than half of the *I hate myself* utterances are so severe.

Sixteen of them directly mitigate the hatred by making it circumstantial.

With regard to *we like us/ourselves*, all but one of the *us* utterances refer to a corporate *us* and the liking is unconditional.

The data for *we like ourselves* is more complex.

All of the liking appears to be unconditional – but there is a difference between a corporate *ourselves* and the identification of *ourselves* as a group of individuals.

In some cases the individuality was clear

However, in others it was not obvious, so there may have been some misinterpretation of the data.

With that caveat, there does appear to be a majority of corporate *ourselves* rather than the predicted majority for individuals.

So what to conclude from this?
The main thing seems to be that what looked a simple question at first sight has turned out to be a complex mixture of issues.
What should have been a simple grammatical exercise, has become mixed with idiom – and the semantics of self – to make a difficult and complex problem.
It is an illustration of the difficulties that surround corpus examinations: to produce lists of utterance frequencies is banal;
But in analysing the frequencies the data fights back against being pinned down.

If forced to make a decision I would say that *I like me* is, in large part, a product of idiom.
But as the related forms become more distant from this exemplar utterance, the more contextual effects come into play.
*I like me* is mainly used because it is idiomatic;
But *we hate us* is mainly used because it has a different meaning to *we hate ourselves*.