

## The Person-Case Constraint in Old English

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Outline of the talk:

1. Introduction
2. The Person-Case Constraint in Germanic
3. The Person-Case Constraint in Old English: method and results
4. Discussion
5. Conclusion

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 The Person-Case Constraint (PCC)

- Restriction on the co-occurrence of weak person markers.
  - Can be clitics, agreement markers, or weak pronouns.
  - Also known as the Person-Role Constraint (Haspelmath 2004).
- First described by Bonet (1991, 1994)
- Cross-linguistically widely observed.
- Comes in two main flavours, **strong** and **weak**:

(1) **Strong PCC** (Basque, French, Greek, Kiowa ...):

In a combination of a weak direct object and an indirect object [clitic, agreement marker, weak pronoun], *the direct object has to be 3<sup>rd</sup> person*.

- Permits the following (examples from French):

- (2) Agnès            le/la            me/te            présentera  
 Agnès            3SG.M/F.DO    1/2SG.IO        present.FUT.3SG  
 ‘Agnès will introduce him/her to me/you.’
- (3) Agnès            le/la            lui                présentera  
 Agnès            3SG.M/F.DO    3SG.M/F.IO      present.FUT.3SG  
 ‘Agnès will introduce him/her to him/her.’

- Rules out the following:

- (4) \*Agnès      me/te      lui      présentera.  
 Agnès      1/2SG.DO      3SG.M/F.IO      present.FUT.3SG  
 ‘Agnès will introduce me/you to him/her.’
- (5) \*Agnès      me/te      me/te      présentera.  
 Agnès      1SG.DO      2SG.REC      present.FUT.3SG  
 ‘Agnès will introduce me/you to me/you.’

- Weak version:

- (6) **Weak PCC** (Catalan, Spanish, Italian, Old Occitan ...):

In a combination of a weak direct object and an indirect object, *if there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person it has to be the direct object*. (Bonet 1991: 182; Anagnostopoulou 2008: 15–16)

- In e.g. Catalan, this allows equivalent of (2) and (3) while disallowing (4), as in French.
- *Unlike* French, weak PCC languages permit the equivalent of (5), as in (7) from Catalan:

- (7) Te            m’            ha    venut    el    mercader    més    important.  
 2SG.DO      1SG.IO      has    sold    the    merchant    most    important  
 ‘The most important merchant has sold you to me.’ (Bonet 1991: 41)

- Fun fact: other variants exist.

- The **Super-Strong** PCC in the language Kambera (Haspelmath 2004; Doliana 2013):

- In a combination of a weak direct object and an indirect object, *the direct object must be 3<sup>rd</sup> person and the indirect object must not be*.

- There’s also the **Me-First** PCC in Romanian (Nevins 2007):

- In a combination of a weak direct object and an indirect object, *if there is only one 1<sup>st</sup> person it must not be the direct object*.

- And the **Strictly Descending** PCC for Classical Arabic, Czech, and some speakers of Spanish (Perlmutter 1971, Nevins 2007, Sturgeon *et al.* 2012):

- In a combination of a weak direct object and an indirect object, *the person of the direct object ≥ the person of the indirect object*.

- And perhaps more. But these will not feature further today.

### 1.2 Theoretical interest of the PCC

- The PCC can't be explained purely semantically:
  - There's nothing wrong with thoughts like (4) and (5).
  - Some languages seem not to have the PCC at all.

(8) “You were going to give them me.”

(Buffy, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, season 2 episode 7 ‘Lie to Me’)

- But what component of the grammar is responsible for PCC effects?
  - Syntax? (e.g. Anagnostopoulou 2005, Nevins 2007, Adger & Harbour 2007)
  - Morphology? (e.g. Bonet 1994)
  - The syntax-morphology interface? (e.g. Sturgeon *et al.* 2012, Doliana 2013)
- Why do they affect only phonologically weak items?
  - (We should probably reconsider (8).)
- And why and how do they arise diachronically?

### 1.3 Old English

- Ancestor language of Modern English.
    - West Germanic; bears syntactic similarities to continental Germanic languages.
  - Spoken before the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.
    - Our written records date mostly from the 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries.
    - Most of those records are in a single dialect, West Saxon.
  - 1.5-million-word syntactically parsed corpus available (Taylor *et al.* 2003); searchable using CorpusSearch (Randall 2005–2007).
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## 2. The Person-Case Constraint in Germanic

- The usual view: continental Germanic doesn't seem to have any PCC restrictions (for German and Dutch, Cardinaletti 1999: 65; Haspelmath 2004).

(9) weil            er        mich            ihm            gestern        nicht    vorgestellt    hat  
 because        he        1SG.DO        3SG.M.IO    yesterday    not    introduced    hat  
 ‘because he did not introduce me to him yesterday’ (German)

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- (10) Ze stelden me 'm / ? 'm me voor  
 they introduced 1SG.DO 3SG.M.IO / 3SG.M.IO 1SG.DO PRT  
 'they introduced me to him' (Dutch)

- But Bonet (1991) shows the PCC to be operative in Swiss German and English:

- (11) \*They showed her me  
 ((Standard Southern British) English; though cf. (8))

- (12) D' Maria zeigt em mich  
 the Maria shows 3SG.M.IO 1SG.DO  
 'Mary shows him to me' (Swiss German; cf. Werner 1999)

- Anagnostopoulou (2008) gives an overview of PCC effects in Germanic, particularly in German.
  - Anagnostopoulou (2008) demonstrates PCC effects with pronouns occupying the Wackernagel position (immediately after C<sup>0</sup>) in German (*pace* Haspelmath 2004).

- (13) \*weil dich ihm irgendwer vorgestellt hat  
 because 2SG.DO 3SG.M.IO someone-NOM introduced has  
 'because someone has introduced you to him'

- (14) ??weil mich ihr irgendwer vorgestellt hat  
 because 2SG.DO 3SG.F.IO someone-NOM introduced has  
 'because someone has introduced me to her'

- Observations:
  - German has the *weak* PCC, not the *strong* PCC.
  - Correlates with a requirement for DOs to precede IOs in Wackernagel position.
  - PCC effects only arise when the subject follows the DO and IO pronouns.
- Anagnostopoulou (2008: 27–28) finds similar situations in Dutch and Swedish.
  - Judgements are, in general, less stable and robust and more prone to variation than in clitic languages.

### 3. The Person-Case Constraint in Old English

- Research question: do PCC effects exist in Old English?
  - And if so, which kind?

#### 3.1 Method

- Search of the YCOE corpus (Taylor et al. 2003) using CorpusSearch 2 (Randall 2005–2007):
  - Search targeted all clusters of IO and DO pronouns (in either order).
  - See the appendix to this handout for the query used.
- Results were then analysed by hand for person and number and to exclude a number of false positives (for instance, pronouns adjacent across clause boundaries).

#### 3.2 Results

		Accusative			Total
		1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	
Dative	1 <sup>st</sup>	0	2	56	58
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3	0	41	44
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	1 (?)	61	62
Total		3	3	158	164

- *Strong* PCC predicts that there should be no examples in the top left four cells.
  - This is not correct: there are five apparent counterexamples.

(15) þa þe **me** þe sealdon  
 those that 1SG.DO 2SG.IO gave  
 ‘those who gave me to you’ (coverhom,HomS\_24\_[ScraggVerc\_1]:176.186)

(16) ne þinne Drihten þe **me** þe sealde  
 nor your god that 1SG.DO 2SG.IO gave  
 ‘nor your god who gave me to you’ (coverhom,HomU\_9\_[ScraggVerc\_4]:283.783)

(17) se þe **me** þe sealde  
 he that 1SG.DO 2SG.IO gave  
 ‘he who gave me to you’ (cowsgosp,Jn\_[WSCp]:19.11.7303)

(18) God þe me on geweald sealde  
 God 2SG.DO 1SG.IO in power gave  
 ‘God gave you into my power’ (cogregdC,GD\_1\_[C]:3.25.4.263)

(19) & for ðam hider þe me to cwalme brohton  
 and for that hither 2SG.DO 1SG.IO to death.DAT brought  
 ‘and for that reason (they) brought you hither to me for death’

- These examples don’t make it a 100% sure thing, but:
  - they’re from different texts
    - Vercelli Homilies
    - West Saxon Gospels
    - Gregory’s Dialogues
  - they involve different verbs
    - *sellan* ‘give’
    - *bringan* ‘bring’
  - (15)–(17) unambiguously involve the Wackernagel position
- So we can conclude that Old English doesn’t have the *strong* PCC.
- *Weak* PCC predicts that there should be no examples in the two cells below those (highlighted in grey), i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person DO with 3<sup>rd</sup> person IO.
  - There is one example, but it is highly dubious.

(20) þæt he of his þæm fæderlican sceate þe him to meder ...  
 that he of his the.DAT fatherly.DAT bosom.DAT 2SG.DO 3SG.M.IO to mother  
 ‘that he, from his father’s bosom, [chooses] you as his mother’  
 (coblick,HomU\_18\_[BIHom\_1]:5.29.33)

- The manuscript is damaged at this point; the clause is incomplete (no verb!).
  - In the YCOE, *þe* is tagged as a 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun (as it is analysed in editions), but it could just as easily be the homophonous relativizing particle.
- If it is a ditransitive, the pronouns are not in Wackernagel position, and follow the subject.
- If this example can be discounted, then there are no exceptions to the *weak* PCC in the YCOE.

Figure 1: Blickling Homilies manuscript, folio 1v (from Willard 1960)

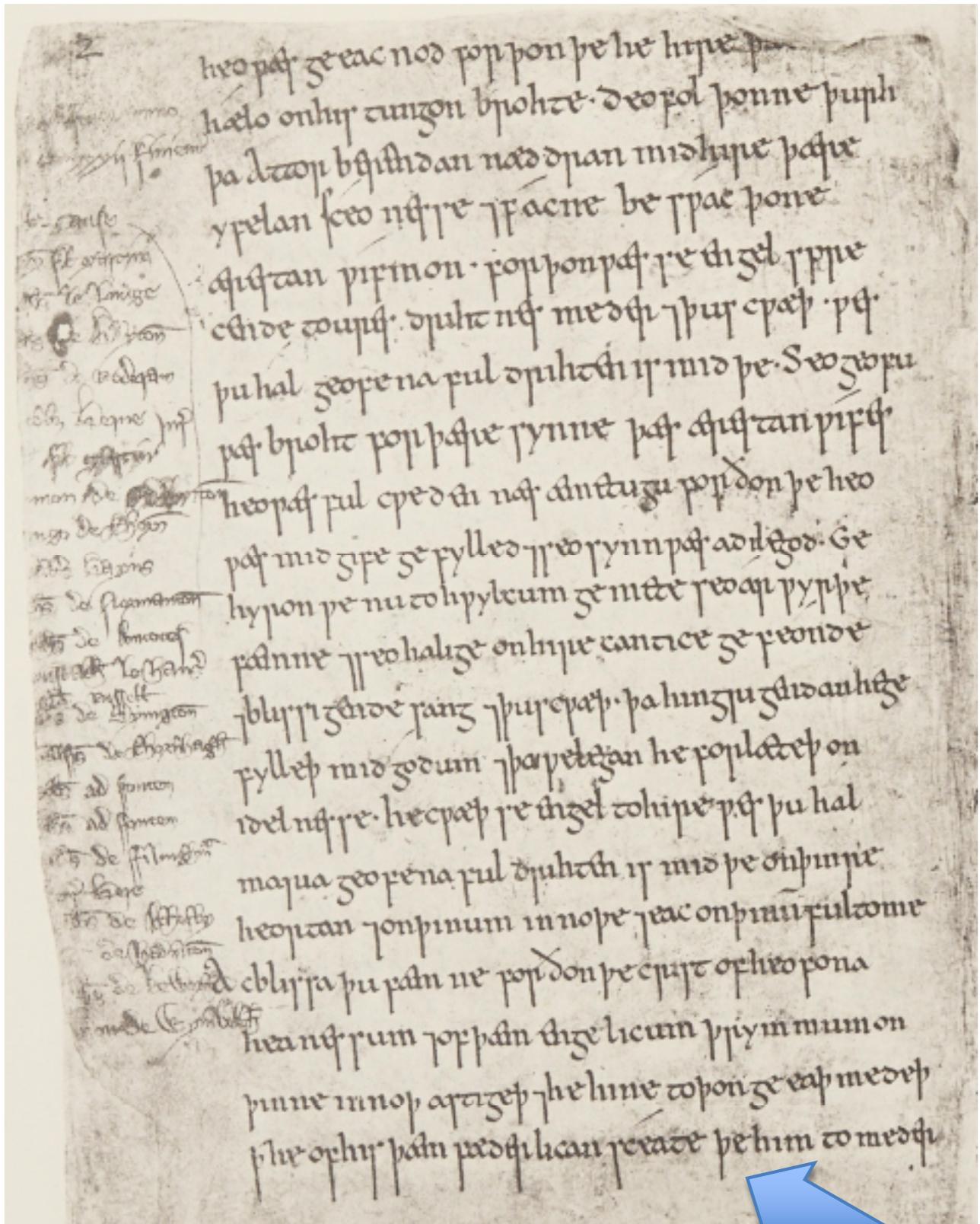
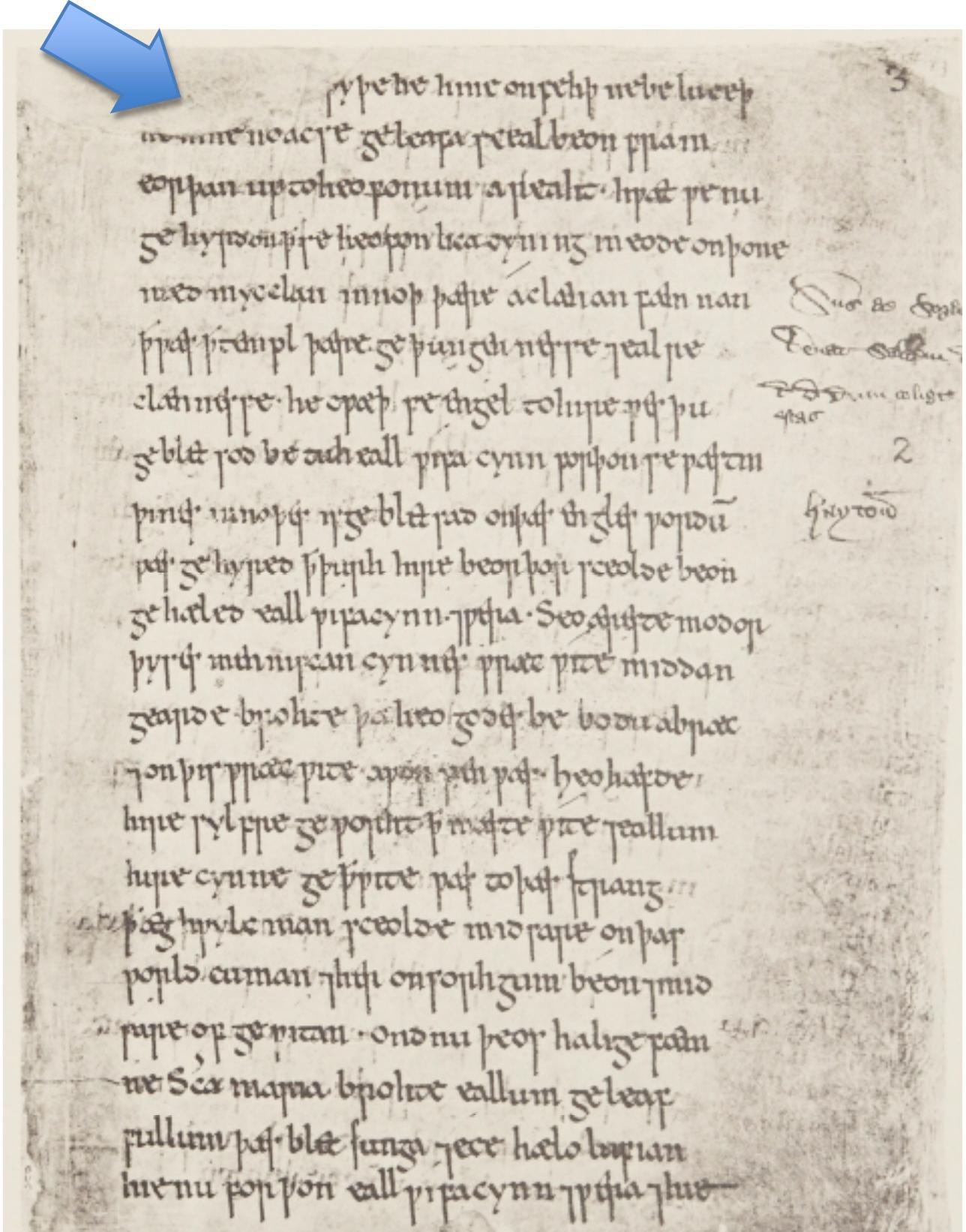


Figure 2: Blickling Homilies manuscript, folio 2r (from Willard 1960)



## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Meaningful or accidental gap?

- *Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*
  - But no native speakers, so no grammaticality judgements possible.
- How many examples would we expect to find if the weak PCC did not hold?
- Distribution in the table in 3.2 is clearly not completely accidental (two-tailed Fisher's exact test,  $p=0.03147$ ).
- Even in languages in which the PCC does not hold, there is, '[f]or obvious semantic reasons' (Haspelmath 2004: 33):
  - a tendency for recipients to be animate ('virtually always')
  - a tendency for themes to be inanimate ('a strong tendency')

#### Sceptical excursus

- Actually, I don't think these reasons are so obvious: it depends on the predicate. *Introduce*, for instance, is most natural with two animates, and *give* can quite happily take two inanimates, as in "gave the building a new name".)
- Haspelmath (2004: 35) only presents evidence from a corpus of German, the writings of Goethe (!). But as we've seen, the PCC actually does hold in German under some conditions, so Haspelmath's conclusion is vitiated.

- Granting this, we have two alternative hypotheses:
  - Hypothesis 1: the weak PCC holds for OE.
  - Hypothesis 2: PCC-violating examples, rather than being ungrammatical, are accidentally unattested because of their semantic unlikelihood.
- How can we disambiguate between these?
  - Using basic probability: the expected probability of a weak-PCC-violating ditransitive should be
    - the probability of a 3<sup>rd</sup>-person dative pronoun, x
    - the probability of a 1<sup>st</sup>- or 2<sup>nd</sup>-person accusative pronoun
  - Using current dataset, and excluding (20), which may not even be a ditransitive:
    - $61/163 \times 5/163 = 305/26569 \approx \underline{0.0115}$
  - Out of 163 examples we would therefore expect to see 1–2 weak PCC violations, where in fact we (arguably) see none.
- This indicates that the weak PCC may have been active in OE (though not conclusive!).

#### 4.2 *The importance of ordering*

- The data also support Anagnostopoulou's (2008: 29) generalization that the weak PCC with non-clitic pronouns is linked to strict ordering of direct and indirect pronominal objects:
  - Of the 164 examples:
    - 160 displayed the order accusative-dative
    - only 4 exhibited dative-accusative order
  - Similar to modern German, in which the dative-accusative order is marginal (only possible with strong pronouns?)

#### 5. Conclusion

- It's reasonable to assume that the weak PCC held in OE.
    - (Though coincidence cannot be ruled out.)
    - Using probabilistic reasoning, it's possible to make inferences about nonexistence in dead languages – at least in principle!
  - Given its typological similarity to continental West Germanic, this is unsurprising.
  - Supports previous generalizations linking the PCC to accusative-dative pronoun ordering.
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### Appendix: query used to find potential PCC violations

```
node: $ROOT
query: ([1]NP|NP-ACC|NP-DAT iDoms [2]PRO|PRO^A|PRO^D) AND
      ([3]NP|NP-ACC|NP-DAT iDoms [4]PRO|PRO^A|PRO^D) AND ([1]NP|NP-
      ACC|NP-DAT iPrecedes [3]NP|NP-ACC|NP-DAT)
```

(False positives were then weeded out by hand.)