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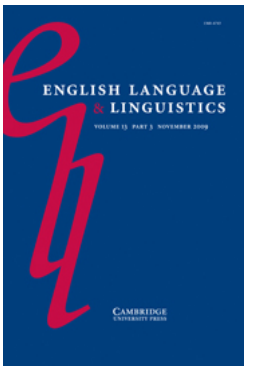


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# Grammatical person and the variable syntax of Old English personal pronouns[1]

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The variable positioning of bare personal pronouns in Old English prose remains something of a mystery. In the role of prepositional object, for example, these elements are often found in positions where other prepositional object types are rarely attested. This article reports the results of an empirical study of a correlation between the variable placement of these pronouns and their specification for grammatical person. By demonstrating that this correlation defies a number of independent explanations, it is argued that person is an important aspect of the syntax of these constituents. The identification of two further correlations, one involving narrative mode and the other involving the relative positioning of preposition and verb, further demonstrates the value of quantitative methods in historical linguistics.

## 1 Introduction

Old English word order has been, and continues to be, the subject of extensive research, but there remain a number of syntactic phenomena which are not fully understood. One such phenomenon concerns variation in the placement of bare, i.e. unmodified and uncoordinated, personal pronouns functioning as the object of a preposition. These pronouns can be found immediately to the right or the left of their governor, as in (1a, b) or somewhere even further to its left, as in (1c). Full DPs, demonstrative pronouns and coordinated or modified personal pronouns, on the other hand, are almost invariably positioned immediately to the preposition's right (Wende 1915: 136–41; Mitchell 1978: §4; Allen 1980: 287; Taylor 2008: 343), as in (2).[2]

(1) (a) Ac þa hundas comon **to him**
But the dogs came to him
'But the dogs came to him' (cogregdC,GDPref_and_4_[C]:34.310.6.4623)

[1] I am grateful to Peter Ackema, Ronnie Cann, Caroline Heycock, the 2008 Richard M. Hogg Prize Committee and the two anonymous *English Language and Linguistics* referees for their extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article, and I am especially indebted to Linda van Bergen for her excellent mentorship throughout my ongoing postgraduate studies. For their financial support, I sincerely thank the AHRC for my Research Preparation Masters Scheme award (2006/123055), the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for my current doctoral scholarship, and all contributors to the 2008 Richard M. Hogg Prize fund.

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, references for all examples are to the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (Taylor, Warner, Pintzuk & Beths 2003). Translations of examples taken from the YCOE's *Lives of Saints* text file ('coaelive') are those of Skeat (1881–1900).

(b) and se hælend sylf of heofonum com **him to**
and the saviour himself from heavens came him to
'and the Saviour Himself came to him from heaven'
(coaelive, ÆLS_[Thomas]:13.7546)

(c) ond misenlico wilddeor **him** þær comon **to**
and various wild-beasts him there came to
'and various wild beasts there came to him'
(comart3,Mart_5_[Kotzor]:Ju2,A.6.887)

(2) se com **to þam halgan**
he came to the saint
'he came to the saint' (coaelive, ÆLS_[Swithun]:421.4483)

Leading analyses of Old English syntax predict the placement of bare personal pronouns to the left of a governing preposition to be a freely available option (e.g. van Kemenade 1987; Pintzuk 1991), although there is evidence to suggest that such special placement is sensitive to a number of factors, including: pronoun case (Wende 1915: 80–1; Mitchell 1978: §3; Taylor 2008: 351, table 8); grammatical number of the pronoun (Taylor 2008: 357, fn. 9); modification or coordination of the preposition (Wende 1915: 65–8); the particular preposition involved (Wende 1915: 71–3; Kitson 1996: 28–32; Taylor 2008: 352, table 10); the preposition's semantics (Wende 1915: 73–6); the preposition's function (Wende 1915: 68–9); the particular verb with which the preposition co-occurs (Taylor 2008: 353, table 11); and whether or not the pronoun occurs in a Latin translation (Taylor 2008: 347–9). The focus of this article, however, is one particular correlation, first noted by Wende (1915), involving the pronouns' specification for grammatical person.

Table 1 summarises the results of Wende's (1915: 76) analysis, by person, of the bare personal pronoun objects of seven prepositions occurring in four major prose texts.[3] Percentages in the 'specially placed' column of table 1 (and subsequent tables) represent proportions of tokens placed somewhere to the preposition's left.

There are two notable aspects to Wende's data: (1) first- and second-person tokens precede their governor with approximately the same frequency; and (2) first- and second-person tokens precede their governor significantly less frequently in comparison to third-person tokens. Despite more recent reports of a range of person-related grammatical asymmetries crosslinguistically (see section 4), there has been no further investigation of the apparent significance of third-person reference for the special placement of personal pronouns in Old English prose and so it is presently unclear how the distribution shown in table 1 should be interpreted.

This article aims to establish whether an independent explanation can be found for the distribution in table 1. Section 2 establishes that it is not an artefact of Wende's sampling, while section 3 shows that it also does not result from: (1) the pronouns'

[3] Wende's corpus consists of: *Cura Pastoralis* (Sweet 1871); *Catholic Homilies* (Thorpe 1844–6); the Old English *Bede* (Miller 1890–8); and the *Parker Chronicle* (Plummer 1892). His study included the personal pronoun objects of: *to* 'to'; *on* 'on, in'; *of* 'of'; *fram* 'from, by'; *mid* 'with'; *for*(*e*) 'before, for'; and *ætforan* 'before'.

Table 1. *Special placement of pronominal prepositional objects by grammatical person (Wende 1915: 76)*

| | N | specially placed |
|---|---|---|
| first person | 200 | 5.0% |
| second person | 116 | 6.0% |
| third person | 763 | 45.4% |
| all tokens | 1,079 | 33.7% |

specification for the feature [human]; (2) a previously unreported effect of narrative mode; or (3) the effects of other factors known to correlate with the variable placement of pronominal prepositional objects in Old English, including the effect of the relative ordering of preposition and verb, a factor which has hitherto lacked quantification. On the basis of these findings, the treatment of grammatical person as an independent variable in the predictability of personal pronoun placement in Old English is defended in section 4.

## 2 Extending the evidence base

### *2.1 Introduction*

As the data in table 1 are limited to the bare personal pronouns governed by a small number of prepositions occurring in a small number of (admittedly sizeable) texts, it is entirely possible that the correlation between special placement and third-person reference is simply a sampling artefact. With the aid of CorpusSearch 2 (Randall 2005), all bare personal pronouns parsed as the object of a preposition in the *York–Toronto–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (YCOE) (Taylor et al. 2003) were identified and classified for person and position.[4] As person features are not labelled in the YCOE, tokens were classified according to their word-initial letter, with <m-> and <u-> forms classified as first person, <þ->, <ð->, <i-> and <e-> forms as second person, and <h-> forms as third person.[5] For the positional variable, pronouns were classified as specially placed when situated somewhere to the preposition's left.[6] For comparative purposes, all other (pro)nominal

[4] The YCOE is the single largest resource of its type, incorporating some 1.5 million words from one hundred texts. Given the large number of relevant tokens identified (see table 2), base editions were consulted only for the purpose of checking and translating particular examples.

[5] All tokens began with one of these letters. As I found no instances of *it* as a prepositional object, all <i-> tokens are unambiguously second person.

[6] The YCOE data confirm that when positioned to the right of a preposition, prepositional objects (of all types) always occur immediately to its right, although genitive elements of complex objects may be right-dislocated

Table 2. *Special placement of pronominal prepositional objects by grammatical person (YCOE)*

| | N | specially placed |
|---|---|---|
| first person | 1,610 | 10.6% |
| second person | 1,342 | 10.1% |
| third person | 6,746 | 36.5% |
| all tokens | 9,698 | 28.5% |

prepositional objects were separately identified and classified for the positional variable.

### *2.2 Results*

Table 2 summarises the results for the bare personal pronouns.[7] While the percentages in table 2 differ somewhat from those in table 1, the same general trends clearly obtain: (1) first- and second-person tokens show a similar frequency of special placement to each other ($\chi^2 = 0.14$, $p = 0.7$), justifying their merger into a single 'non-third-person' category; and (2) the difference in rate of special placement between third- and non-third-person tokens suggests that third-person reference does indeed significantly increase the probability of special placement ($\chi^2 = 686.15$, $p < 0.0001$).[8] Strikingly, of the 33 YCOE text files which contain at least ten third-person tokens and at least ten non-third-person tokens, the correlation between third-person reference and special placement is evident in all but two: 'coalex' (*Alexander's letter to Aristotle*), which contains an unusually high number of non-third-person tokens (N = 43, 20 (47%) specially placed) in comparison to third-person tokens (N = 15, 4 (27%) specially

from their head noun (Mitchell 1985: §1315), e.g.:

(i) … & **to lufan** & **to geornfulnesse** awehte **godra dæda.**
and to love and to desire roused good deeds
'and roused (them) to the love and to the desire of good deeds' (cobede,Bede_4:25.346.15.3483)

[7] Excluded from table 2 are the 15 tokens which occur between the elements of a complex preposition, e.g. (i). As some 96 other (pro)nominal objects occur complex-medially, e.g. (ii), it is clear that this position is not special to personal pronouns.

(i) (a) on him uppan
'on it' (cocura,CP:33.219.1.1457)
(b) wið his weard
'towards him' (coaelhom, ÆHom_15:1.2133)
(ii) (a) on ðæm weobude uppan
'upon the altar' (cocura,CP:33.219.4.1458)
(b) wiþ þæs heofones weard
'heavenward' (coaelive, ÆLS_[Oswald]:114.5449)

[8] All chi-square values were calculated using the online resource published by Lowry (2001–9). For significance at the 0.05 level, a chi-square value ≥ 3.84 is required.

placed);[9] and 'corood' (*History of the Holy Rood-Tree*), in which special placement of non-third-person tokens (N = 20, 8 (40%) specially placed) and third-person tokens (N = 82, 31 (38%) specially placed) occurs with approximately the same frequency.

The YCOE data thus provide clear evidence that the apparent significance of third-person reference for the special placement of bare personal pronouns functioning as the object of a preposition (henceforth 'PPOPs') reported by Wende (1915: 76) cannot be explained as an artefact of his sampling. Furthermore, its consistency in 31 of the 33 text files which provide a meaningful number of tokens strongly suggests that this correlation is (at least partially) independent of any chronological, authorship and genre considerations relevant to this corpus.

The positional analysis of other (pro)nominal prepositional objects occurring in the YCOE confirms that special placement of full DPs, demonstrative pronouns and modified or coordinated personal pronouns is indeed exceptional: just 99 out of 109,849 such tokens (0.09%) occur somewhere to the preposition's left.[10]

## 3 Grammatical person as an independent variable

### *3.1 Introduction*

This section seeks an explanation for the generalised person asymmetry evident in table 2 by reference to factors other than the pronouns' specification for person. In each case, however, the evidence favours person as the more likely conditioning factor. The first study, motivated by cross-linguistic work on pronoun typology, considers whether the asymmetry results from the pronouns' specification for the feature [human]

[9] All but 4 of the 43 non-third-person tokens in 'coalex' are first-person forms. The relatively high proportion of first-person tokens in this text is unsurprising given its egocentric aspect (Orchard 1995: 116–39).

[10] A cursory examination of these 99 tokens reveals some which admit an alternative, and unproblematic, parse, for example: object of an elided verb, e.g. (i), in which I assume *mid* has a null argument; subject, e.g. (ii); and object of complex verb, e.g. (iii), in which *fore* may be analysed as the prefixal element of *foreswerian* 'to swear before'. In support of this alternative analysis of (iii), see (iv) in which the position of the object DP to the right of, but not adjacent to, *fore* precludes the treatment of *fore* as a preposition (cf. fn. 6). In (i–iv), the elements of the purported prepositional phrase are in bold.

(i) Eft wið þon ilcan **celeþonian seaw & sæwæter**, smire **mid** þa eagan
Then against the same celandine sap & seawater anoint with the eyes
'Then, for the same [ailment], celandine sap and seawater. Anoint the eyes with it'
(colaece,Lch_II_[1]:2.3.1.182)

(ii) and **his hors** wearð **under** ofscoten
and his horse was beneath killed
'and his horse was killed beneath [him]' (cochronD,ChronD_[Classen-Harm]:1079.6.2514)

(iii) . . . þæt land, þe ðu **hyra fæderum fore** swore?
the land, which you their fathers before swore
'. . . the land, which you swore before their fathers?' (cootest,Num:11.12.4035)

(iv) . . . ðæt land, þe ic fore swor heora fæderum
the land which I before swore their fathers
'. . . the land, which I swore before their fathers' (cootest,Num:14.22.4178)

(section 3.2). The second study, prompted by an empirical observation of the data reported in table 2, tests whether the person asymmetry is simply a consequence of the high frequency of third-person tokens and the low frequency of non-third-person tokens in one particular context which appears to favour special placement of PPOPs (section 3.3). The final study explores whether the asymmetry can be explained as a by-product of the effects of various other factors which have been associated with PPOP placement in Old English (section 3.4).

## *3.2 The [human] hypothesis*

### *3.2.1 Introduction*

Across many unrelated languages, pronouns with nonhuman reference have been shown to exhibit special syntactic behaviour, such as an inability to be modified or coordinated and an inability to appear in peripheral positions (for evidence from modern West Germanic varieties, see Haegeman 1993; Cardinaletti & Starke 1996, 1999; Cardinaletti 1999). Assuming, uncontroversially, that nonhuman reference typically entails third-person reference, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that the data distribution in table 2 follows from the pronouns' feature specification for [human] rather than [person].

In order to falsify this hypothesis, a small study was conducted to investigate whether PPOPs are specially placed significantly more frequently when their referent is nonhuman. This study therefore focuses on third-person tokens as these are naturally the most likely to have nonhuman reference. Since neuter pronouns are significantly more likely than either masculine or feminine pronouns to have a nonhuman referent in Old English (Mitchell 1985), two separate samples were drawn from the third-person data reported in table 2.

### *3.2.2 First sample*

The first sample targeted neuter pronouns, because, according to Mitchell (1985: §§55–71): (1) neuter pronouns typically refer to neuter nouns; (2) neuter nouns typically refer to nonhumans; and (3) anaphoric reference to those few neuter nouns with human reference tends to reflect natural gender, for example:

(3) (a) Dæt cild . . . he
The child-NEUT. . . he-MASC (ÆCHom i.24.27 [Mitchell 1985: §69 (3a)])
(b) to ðam wife . . . hire
to the woman-NEUT. . . her-FEM (ÆCHom i.16.32 [Mitchell 1985: §69 (3a)])

On the basis of these generalisations we may assume that neuter pronouns are highly likely to have nonhuman reference. Consequently, if PPOP special placement is associated with nonhuman reference, we should expect most neuter PPOPs to be specially placed.

Since *hit* 'it (acc, 3sg, neut)' is the only unambiguously neuter object pronoun in the Old English personal pronoun paradigm, all instances of this pronoun were isolated from the 6,746 third-person tokens reported in table 2.[11] Surprisingly, just seven tokens were found, including one, given in (4), whose prepositional governor is an editorial addition (Sweet 1871: 405, l.6).

(4) midðæm ðe **hit** cnyssað **on** unryhta wilnunga, & hit toterað
when it strike against unrighteous desires and it destroy
'when unrighteous desires strike against it and destroy it' (cocura,CP:52.405.3.2769)

Of the other six tokens: two have human reference, illustrated by (5); one refers to an idea expressed earlier in the text, (6);[12] and three, illustrated by (7), have a nonhuman referent.

(5) Þonne se mæssepreost cristnað ærest þæt cild, þonne orðað he þriw
When the mass-priest christens first the child then breathes he three
on an **on hit**
forthwith on it
'When the high-priest first christens the child, he then breathes thrice on it forthwith'
(cowulf,WHom_8b:15.549)

(6) gif ge **hit** georne **ymbe** smeagan willað & æfter spyrigan
if you it carefully about think wish and later pursue
'if you wish to think carefully about it and later pursue it' (coboeth,Bo:16.36.4.651)

(7) gyf ðu ðin tol ahefst **ofer hit** (antecedent of *hit* = *weofod* 'altar (neut)')
if you your tool raise over it
'if you raise your tool over it' (cootest,Exod:20.25.3212)

Of the six valid tokens, only that in (6) is specially placed.[13] However, there are clearly too few *hit* tokens to conclude anything meaningful about their placement. For the moment, then, it is sufficient to note that *hit*, the pronoun most likely to have a nonhuman referent, rarely occurs as the object of a preposition in the YCOE, a matter which I discuss further in section 3.2.4.

### *3.2.3 Second sample*

Although Old English neuter pronouns typically denote nonhuman entities, it is not the case that pronominal reference to nonhumans typically involves a neuter form (Mitchell 1985: §60). A second sample, consisting of the 517 third-person tokens occurring in the YCOE's *Lives of Saints* text file ('coaelive'), was therefore chosen to gauge the frequency with which masculine and feminine PPOPs occur with nonhuman

[11] The search terms targeted all spelling variants of *hit*.
[12] The use of *hit* as a recapitulatory pronoun is noted by Mitchell (1985: §1490).
[13] Bosworth & Toller (1898) and Clark Hall (1960) list nominal *ymbsmeagung* 'consideration', but neither lists a verbal counterpart.

reference.[14] Each token's antecedent was categorised as either 'human' or 'other', with the former category reserved for: persons (living or dead); Christ; God; the gods; angels; and the devil or devils. All but fourteen tokens were found to occur with a 'human' referent, although some of the 'other' referents also show signs of personification, for example:

(8) Þas ðincg soðlice, ðæt is se lichama and seo sawl winnað **him** **betweonan**.
These things verily that is the body and the soul fight themselves between.
'These things verily, that is the body and the soul, fight between themselves.'
(coaelive, ÆLS_[Auguries]:7.3537)

Being coindexed with the subject of *winnan* 'to fight, strive, struggle', *se lichama* (nom, masc) and *seo sawl* (nom, fem) are clearly understood with a sense of agency which is further implied in the immediately ensuing text:

(9) Ac seo sawl is ðæs flæsces hlæfdige, and hire gedafnað þæt heo simle gewylde ða wylne, þæt is þæt flæsc, to hyre hæsum
But the soul is the flesh's mistress and her befits that she ever rule the bondmaid that is the flesh to her hests
'But the soul is the flesh's mistress, and it befitteth her that she should ever rule the bondmaid, that is the flesh, according to her hests'
(coaelive,ÆLS_[Auguries]:8.3538–9)

The remaining 'other' referents include concrete entities such as the sun and the earth, as well as abstract concepts such as life, pride and God's holy law. While this is not the place to debate Anglo-Saxon philosophy or anthropomorphism, I suggest that such considerations might help explain the apparently exceptional reference to nonhuman entities by tokens in this sample.

*3.2.4 Summary*

The analyses of both samples suggest that third-person PPOPs with nonhuman reference are somewhat exceptional in Old English.[15] Such a restriction on the semantics of PPOPs is not without parallel: see Toebosch (2003: 45–7) for evidence from non-Southern Dutch and Zwart (2005: 920) for evidence from other West Germanic varieties. The parallel with Old English does not end there, however. In these other varieties, an anaphoric prepositional object with nonhuman reference is realised either as a demonstrative pronoun, which invariably follows the preposition, or

[14] This text file was chosen for practical reasons: it is one of the largest in the YCOE, and its base edition (Skeat 1881–1900) includes a facing-page translation which considerably facilitated identification of the pronouns' antecedents.

[15] We can be certain that the paucity of *hit* tokens cannot simply be attributed to a preference for dative as the case of Old English prepositions as the YCOE contains 496 tokens of *hine* 'him, it (acc, 3sg, masc)' in one or other spelling variant. The reason for the low incidence of *hit* as PPOP must, therefore, be grounded in its gender rather than its case.

as a form equivalent to 'there' or 'here', which invariably precedes the preposition. The YCOE data show that this is precisely the situation in Old English also: demonstrative pronouns invariably follow a governing preposition and refer freely to nonhuman entities, as in (10), while *þær* 'there' and *her* 'here' invariably precede a governing preposition, sometimes at a distance, and also freely (perhaps even typically) have nonhuman reference, as in (11).[16]

(10) (a) and him com to an fæt, fyðerscyte and brad, and **binnan þam**
and him came to a vessel, four-cornered and broad and within that
wæron ealle cuce nytenu
were all living creatures
'and a vessel came to him four-cornered and broad, and within it there were all living creatures' (coaelive, ÆLS[Peter's_Chair]:83.2328–9)

(b) Gelæhte þa of ðam ente his agen swurd, and his ormæte heafod
Took then from the giant his own sword and his huge head
**mid þam** of asloh
with that off struck
'Then he took from the giant his own sword, and struck off his huge head therewith' (coaelive, ÆLS_[Book_of_Kings]:25.3674–5)

(11) (a) & Eadweard cyng feng to Lundenbyrg & to Oxnaforda, &
and Edward king took-charge of London and of Oxford and
to ðæm landum eallum þe **þær to** hierdon.
of the lands all which there to belonged
'And King Edward took charge of London and of Oxford and of all the lands which belonged thereto' (cochronA-2b,ChronA_[Plummer]:912.1.1217)

(b) ac **ðær** comon munecas **to** on ðæs mannes forðsiðe,
but there came monks to on the man's death
'but monks came thereto upon the man's death' (coaelhom,ÆHom_11:163.1580)

If, as the evidence suggests, Old English grammar does indeed inhibit the realisation of a prepositional object as a personal pronoun where the referent is nonhuman, then the three *hit* tokens with nonhuman reference reported in section 3.2.2 must be seen as rare exceptions.[17]

In terms of understanding the person asymmetry in table 2, however, it seems safe to conclude that it is highly unlikely to result from the pronouns' specification for [human] since the personal pronouns most likely to be specified [-human], i.e. third-person forms, appear rarely to be so when functioning as the object of a preposition.

[16] Although *þær* and *her* are traditionally classified as adverbs (e.g. Clark Hall 1960, Mitchell 1985: §1121), their pronominal 'flavour' has attracted occasional comment (e.g. Mitchell 1985: §1155, fn. 267) and is implied by their alternative descriptions as 'R-pronouns' (in accordance with their form) or 'locative pronouns' (in accordance with their prototypical function), e.g. van Kemenade (1987: 108–9).

[17] Each of these three tokens occurs in a Latin translation, which could explain their exceptionality.

Table 3. *PPOP distribution by grammatical person and narrative mode*

| | N | mimetic contexts | diegetic contexts |
|---|---|---|---|
| non-third person | 2,684 | 83.5% | 16.5% |
| third person | 5,667 | 16.5% | 83.5% |
| all tokens | 8,351 | 38.0% | 62.0% |

Table 4. *PPOP placement by grammatical person and narrative mode*

| | mimetic contexts | | diegetic contexts | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| non-third person | 2,240 | 9.4% | 444 | 17.1% |
| third person | 933 | 22.2% | 4,734 | 39.0% |
| all tokens | 3,173 | 13.1% | 5,178 | 37.1% |

### *3.3 Narrative mode*

#### *3.3.1 Introduction*

The YCOE's identification of material occurring in clauses of direct speech enabled the discovery of another person-related asymmetry exhibited by PPOPs, as shown in table 3.[18] To make the relevant distinctions, I adopt the term 'mimetic' (from *mimesis* 'imitation of another person's words', *OED*) to refer to direct speech contexts, and 'diegetic' (from *diegesis* 'the narrative presented by a literary work' *OED*) to refer to 'elsewhere' contexts.[19]

As is clear from table 3, non-third-person tokens preponderate in mimetic contexts, whereas third-person tokens preponderate in diegetic contexts. This section therefore tests whether there is a link between the asymmetric distribution of PPOPs according to person and their asymmetric distribution according to narrative mode.

#### *3.3.2 Results*

Table 4 cross-tabulates the frequency of special placement by grammatical person and narrative mode. Table 4 reveals, firstly, that PPOPs are significantly less likely to be

[18] Data in table 3 represent PPOPs occurring in the 43 text files which contain at least one third-person PPOP and at least one non-third-person PPOP.

[19] Tokens are classed as mimetic if they occur in a clause labelled as a clause of direct speech by the YCOE editors. Complements of verbs of saying are always labelled as direct speech. In other contexts, however, the direct speech label is used only where personal comments of the narrator can be readily distinguished from the narrative, as is the case, for example, in *Bede* and *Orosius*. Accordingly, tokens occurring in *in*direct speech are classified here as diegetic.

specially placed in mimetic contexts than in diegetic contexts: 9.4% vs 17.1% for non-third-person data ($\chi^2 = 23.33$, $p < 0.0001$); and 22.2% vs 39% for third-person data ($\chi^2 = 95.09$, $p < 0.0001$). To my knowledge this correlation has not previously been reported and its underlying basis is far from clear (although see section 4 for a possible explanation).

However, despite the preponderance of non-third-person tokens in mimetic contexts (where special placement is *less* frequent) and the preponderance of third-person tokens in diegetic contexts (where special placement is *more* frequent), table 4 also shows that third-person tokens are specially placed significantly more frequently in comparison to non-third-person tokens, both in mimetic contexts ($\chi^2 = 94.71$, $p < 0.0001$) and in diegetic contexts ($\chi^2 = 83.1$, $p < 0.0001$).

In summary, the discovery that special placement of these constituents is significantly less frequent in direct speech than elsewhere is an extremely interesting finding in its own right, but appears to offer no insight into the underlying basis of the person asymmetry evident in table 2.

### *3.4* Cweðan to *study*

#### *3.4.1 Introduction*

This final study attempts to control for a number of other effects which have been associated with the placement of PPOPs in Old English, namely (see section 1 for references): pronoun case; the particular preposition involved, as well as its semantics and function; the particular verb with which the preposition co-occurs; and, in translations, interference from Latin word order. By controlling for these factors, the goal of this study is to identify whether the apparent effect of grammatical person is simply an epiphenomenon of these other effects. The required controls are achieved by focusing on the behaviour of PPOPs co-occurring with a *cweðan to* 'to say, speak, declare to' construction.[20] This construction was chosen, firstly, because it is one of the most frequently occurring verb + preposition combinations in the YCOE and, secondly, because it invariably occurs with a dative object (Ogura 1992: 373).[21] The data examined consist of the 1,022 *cweðan to* tokens occurring in the 18 YCOE text files which contain at least one third-person and at least one non-third-person *cweðan to* token. To help gauge whether any interesting aspects of the *cweðan to* data are construction-specific or obtain more generally, a control dataset, consisting of the remaining 3,968 PPOPs in the same 18 text files, is subjected to identical analyses.

[20] As the YCOE is not lemmatised, the search targeted all morphological forms of *cweðan* and all of their spelling variants.

[21] Constructions which invariably occur with a dative PPOP are an ideal target for investigating PPOP special placement. An analysis, by case, of all bare third-person PPOPs in the YCOE reveals that dative tokens are not only the most frequently occurring (accounting for about 88% of tokens), they are also specially placed far more frequently in comparison to accusative tokens (42.1% vs 4.6% respectively). A similar analysis of non-third-person PPOPs is precluded by their case-ambiguous forms. Genitive tokens make up less than 0.5% of all bare PPOPs and invariably follow the preposition.

Table 5. *PPOP placement by grammatical person and text type (*cweðan to *data)*

| | translations | | non-translations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| non-third person | 52 | 12.0% | 14 | 14.0% |
| third person | 596 | 23.5% | 323 | 82.4% |
| all tokens | 648 | 22.5% | 337 | 79.5% |

Table 6. *PPOP placement by grammatical person and text type (control data)*

| | translations | | non-translations | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| non-third person | 743 | 4.8% | 678 | 5.0% |
| third person | 1,330 | 22.1% | 1,132 | 45.3% |
| all tokens | 2,073 | 15.9% | 1,810 | 30.2% |

### *3.4.2 Initial findings*

Frequencies of special placement of *cweðan to* tokens according to person and text type are given in table 5. From table 5 it is clear, firstly, that even within this tightly controlled dataset, special placement of PPOPs is significantly less frequent overall in Latin translations than in nontranslations, consistent with the findings of Taylor (2008).[22] However, it is also evident that, in both translations and non-translations, third-person tokens are still significantly more likely than non-third-person tokens to be specially placed.

The results for the control data are given in table 6. Table 6 provides assurance that the *cweðan to* construction is not responsible for the person asymmetry evident in table 2 and, further, that the asymmetry is indeed manifest in both translations and nontranslations.[23]

[22] Taylor's findings are actually more complex. She found that special placement of PPOPs occurring in nonbiblical translations is inhibited by a *direct* interference effect, i.e. one which occurs when the PP corresponds to a PP in the Latin original. Special placement of PPOPs occurring in biblical translations, on the other hand, exhibits *indirect* interference, i.e. one which occurs whether or not there is a corresponding Latin PP. However, as the present article is concerned with the overall effect of these factors rather than their *modus operandi,* I do not distinguish between biblical and nonbiblical data, nor between PPs which correspond to a Latin PP and those which do not.

[23] Tables 5 and 6 also indicate that Latin interference effects are significant only for third-person data. This is an interesting finding in its own right, but one I leave for future research.

Table 7. *PPOP placement by position of P relative to V*

| | *cweðan to* data | | control data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| [V (. . .) P] contexts | 839 | 32.1% | 2,269 | 17.9% |
| [P (. . .) V] contexts | 183 | 90.7% | 1,699 | 27.9% |
| all tokens | 1,022 | 42.6% | 3,968 | 22.2% |

*3.4.3 Effect of position of preposition relative to the verb*

Immediately apparent from a cursory inspection of the *cweðan to* data is the strong correlation between the position of the pronoun relative to *to*, and the position of *to* relative to the form of *cweðan*, as illustrated by the following minimal pairs:

(12) (a) Petrus cwæð **to him**
Peter said to him
'Peter said to him' (cogregdC,GDPref_1_[C]:7.5.48)
(b) Petrus **him to** cwæð
'Peter said to him' (cogregdC,GD_1_[C]:2.20.5.196)

(13) (a) and cwæð **to me**
and said to me
'and said to me' (conicodC,Nic_[C]:145.154)
(b) and **me to** cwæð
'and said to me' (conicodC,Nic_[C]:220.227)

In (12a, 13a), where the preposition follows the verb, the pronoun follows the preposition, whereas in (12b, 13b), where the preposition precedes the verb, the pronoun precedes the preposition. This observation prompted an analysis of the frequency of PPOP placement according to the preposition's position relative to the main verb. These results are given in table 7.[24]

Table 7 shows that the special placement of PPOPs does indeed occur significantly more frequently when the preposition precedes the verb, i.e. in [P (. . .) V] contexts, than when the preposition follows the verb, i.e. in [V (. . .) P] contexts.[25] This is especially true of the *cweðan to* data ($\chi^2 = 211.37$, $p < 0.0001$), but holds for the control data also ($\chi^2 = 55.81$, $p < 0.0001$). Although this provides (hitherto lacking) quantitative evidence for the claim by Quirk & Wrenn (1955: §141) that 'postposition [of the

[24] 37 (3.6%) of the 1,022 *cweðan to* tokens and 85 (2.1%) of the 3,968 control tokens reported in table 7 occur in text files which may or may not be Latin translations according to the YCOE editors. These tokens are excluded from tables 5 and 6.

[25] Specially placed PPOPs occurring in [V (. . .) P] contexts include those which follow the verb, as in (i), as well as those which precede the verb, as in (ii).

(i) and he cwæð **him** þa þus **to**
and he said them then thus to
'and he said then thus to them' (coaelhom,ÆHom_8:20.1174)

Table 8. *PPOP placement by grammatical person in [V (. . .) P] contexts*

| | *cweðan to* data | | control data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| non-third person | 58 | 3.0% | 967 | 1.0% |
| third person | 781 | 34.2% | 1,302 | 30.6% |
| all tokens | 839 | 32.1% | 2,269 | 17.9% |

Table 9. *PPOP placement by grammatical person in [P (. . .) V] contexts*

| | *cweðan to* data | | control data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | specially placed | N | specially placed |
| non-third person | 11 | 73.0% | 509 | 12.8% |
| third person | 172 | 91.9% | 1,190 | 34.4% |
| all tokens | 183 | 90.7% | 1,699 | 27.9% |

preposition] is most frequent . . . when it enables the preposition to stand before a verb form', the reason for this correlation is presently unclear.[26]

Having observed that the frequency of special placement of PPOPs varies according to the preposition's position relative to the main verb, the data in table 7 were further analysed by grammatical person to determine whether a person effect is evident in both contexts. The results for data occurring in [V (. . .) P] contexts are given in table 8.

In [V (. . .) P] contexts of both datasets, a person effect is clearly manifest. In addition, frequencies of special placement according to person differs little between the two datasets, with both showing non-third-person tokens to be very rarely in a special position when the preposition follows the main verb.[27]

The results for data occurring in [P (. . .) V] contexts are given in table 9. Once again, a person effect is clearly evident in both datasets, although special placement

(ii) Þæt wif **him** cwæð þa **to**
The woman him said then to
'The woman then said to him' (coaelhom,ÆHom_5:21.690)

[26] A more detailed analysis of data occurring in [P (. . .) V] contexts reveals that PPOP special placement is significantly more frequent when the preposition and verb are immediately adjacent (ignoring verbal negation and infinitival *to*) than when they are not, an effect which is not manifest in [V (. . .) P] contexts. I do not attempt to control for this effect here.

[27] For third-person data the difference between the two datasets is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.94$, $p = 0.08$). Non-third-person data are not suitable for chi-square analysis as only two of the non-third-person *cweðan to* tokens are specially placed.

in [P (. . .) V] contexts is considerably (and inexplicably) more frequent in *cweðan to* constructions in comparison to the control conditions.[28]

*3.4.4 Summary*

The results of the *cweðan to* study show that even when the preposition, verb, pronoun case and text type (i.e. translation or nontranslation) are held constant, third-person PPOPs are still significantly more likely than non-third-person PPOPs to be specially placed. Although special placement also appears to be sensitive to the relative ordering of preposition and lexical verb, the data further suggest that the person asymmetry is independent of this factor also.

## 4 Discussion and outlook

The special placement of personal pronouns to the left of a governing preposition in Old English prose has so far evaded a comprehensive account. In this article, however, three factors, two seldom noted and one previously unreported, are shown to correlate significantly with the phenomenon.

Firstly, we have seen that the grammatical person effect reported by Wende (1915: 76) cannot be attributed to his sampling methods, to a contrast in the pronouns' specification for the feature [human], or to the effects of the various factors controlled for in sections 3.3 and 3.4. The likelihood that person does indeed play a role in conditioning the placement of personal pronouns in Old English is further supported by observations of many other person-conditioned grammatical phenomena crosslinguistically, for example: the general Person−Case Constraint (Bonet 1994), which precludes the combination of a non-third-person accusative pronoun with a third-person dative pronoun, specifically where both pronouns are weak or both are clitics (Cardinaletti 1999: 64–5); restrictions on third-person pro-drop in German (Cardinaletti 1990: 79) and in Standard Finnish and Hebrew (Gutman 2004) in contexts where first and second-person pro-drop is licit; and, in French, the requirement for clitic doubling of first and second-person pronouns in contexts where third-person clitic doubles are not required (Sichel 2002: 14, fn. 7). Viewed from this perspective, it is unsurprising that the special placement of PPOPs in Old English exhibits a third-person vs non-third-person asymmetry in particular (rather than, say, a second- vs non-second-person asymmetry), although more data are needed to determine whether the asymmetry is also unsurprising in terms of the special placement of personal pronouns in other functions and in other languages.

The two other factors found to correlate with PPOP placement are narrative mode and positioning of the preposition relative to the main verb. It is tempting to speculate that the former may in some way be related to the loss of PPOP special placement, already underway during the Old English period (Taylor 2008: 346–7), although this line of

[28] For third-person data the difference between the datasets is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 204.41, p < 0.0001$). Non-third-person data are not suitable for chi-square analysis as only three of the non-third-person *cweðan to* tokens are not specially placed.

argument would rest on two assumptions: firstly, that written language is conservative in comparison to spoken language; and secondly, that written representations of direct speech reflect spoken rather than written norms. Being in a position to defend neither assumption for Old English, I leave this matter, as well as the apparently promoting effect of preverbal placement of the preposition for PPOP special placement, for future research.

When viewed as a whole, the results presented in this article provide compelling evidence that variation in the placement of bare personal pronouns functioning as the object of a preposition in Old English prose is neither a completely unconditioned phenomenon nor the product of any single categorical distinction: instead the special placement of these constituents appears to be best understood in probabilistic terms. Thus while this article goes some way towards establishing a main effect of grammatical person, it is only through the application of multivariate analysis techniques that main, interaction and epiphenomenal effects may be fully differentiated, and the predictive ability of different permutations of conditioning factors may be calculated. This type of analysis will therefore be key to elucidating precisely which facts need be accommodated in a theory of the placement of Old English PPOPs, and its results may perhaps also shed new light on the apparently optional movement of pronouns in other functions and other languages.

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