

Polite Pronouns and the PCC in Italian

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Introducing the Person-Case Constraint

Many languages exhibit person-based restrictions in ditransitive object combinations¹

¹ Bonet 1991, 1994; Anagnostopoulou 2003, 2005, 2017; Béjar and Rezac 2003, 2009; Adger and Harbour 2007; Nevins 2007; Preminger 2009, 2014; Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018; Stegovec 2020; Coon and Keine 2021; Foley and Toosarvandani 2022; Deal 2024; among many others; for Italian, see e.g. Bianchi 2006; D'Alessandro and Pescarini 2016

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Many languages exhibit person-based restrictions in ditransitive object combinations¹

- (1) a. glie= la= ha affidata
 3SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC has entrusted
 ‘He entrusted her to him.’ ✓3>3
- b. te= la= ha affidata
 2SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC has entrusted
 ‘He entrusted her to you.’ ✓2>3
- c. *gli(e)= ti= ha affidato/affidata
 3SG.DAT 2SG.ACC has entrusted
 ‘He entrusted you to him/her.’ ✗3>2

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This talk: Challenge the received morphosyntactic perspective with evidence from ‘polite pronouns’.

- Polite pronouns exhibit a **mismatch** between features expressed in their form and in their agreement vs. what is interpreted.

(2) lei mi= deve delle spiegazioni
 3SG.FEM/LEI.NOM 1SG.DAT owe.3SG some explanations
 ‘{She}/{You (SG, polite)} owe me some explanation.’

Italian
 Form 3SG.FEM, Interpretation 3SG.FEM/2SG

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Italian

Form 3SG.FEM, Interpretation 3SG.FEM/2SG

- Prediction from morphosyntax accounts: 3rd-person polite pronouns should behave like 3rd-person arguments for the PCC

This prediction is falsified for Italian.²

² The interaction between the PCC and the polite pronoun in Italian was first noted in passing by D'Alessandro and Pescarini 2016.

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- (3) glie= la= hanno affidata
 3SG.DAT 3SG.F.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
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- (4) *glie= **La**= hanno affidata/affidato
 3SG.DAT **LEI**.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 ‘They entrusted you (formal) to her.’ ✗3>**LEI**

(From here on out, we’ll capitalize and highlight polite **LEI** in blue.)

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- More broadly: Polite pronouns can be used to probe modularity questions (Wechsler & Hahm 2011; Ackema & Neeleman 2018).
- So we hope to provide a new empirical tool for testing person hierarchies cross-linguistically.

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1 Is LEI really formally 3rd person?

2 The PCC and LEI

3 Towards an analysis

4 Concluding Remarks

Pronominal morphology

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	NOM	ACC clitic	DAT clitic	stressed	POSS	REFL
1SG	io	mi	mi/me	me	mio	mi/me
2SG	tu	ti	ti/te	te	tuo	ti/te
3M.SG	lui	lo	gli/glie	lui	suo	si/se
3F.SG	lei	la	le/glie	lei	suo	si/se
LEI	Lei	La	Le/Glie	Lei	Suo	Si/Se

Verbal agreement

Polite **LEI** takes 3rd person subject agreement, including when it is *pro*-dropped.

- (5) a. tu {sei / *è} qui
 2SG.NOM be.2SG /be.3SG here
 ‘You are here.’
- b. lei {è / *sei} qui
 3SG.F.NOM be.3SG /be.2SG here
 ‘She is here.’

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 3SG.F.NOM be.3SG /be.2SG here
 ‘She is here.’
- (6) a. **Lei** {è / *sei} qui
 LEI.NOM be.PRS.INDC.3SG /be.2SG here
 ‘You (polite) are here.’
- b. dottor Biagi, *pro* {è / #sei} qui!
 doctor Biagi, *pro* be.3SG /be.2SG here
 ‘Doctor Biagi, you’re here!’

Clitics and agreement

What about object clitics?

In Italian, they don't trigger agreement on finite verbs, but they do trigger gender/number agreement on participles.³

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- (7) a. la= ho {vist-a/*vist-o} ieri in TV
 3SG.F.ACC have.1SG seen-F.SG /-M.SG yesterday in TV
 'I saw her on TV yesterday.'
- b. lo= ho {vist-o/*vist-a} ieri in TV
 3SG.M.ACC have.1SG seen-M.SG /-F.SG yesterday in TV
 'I saw him on TV yesterday.'

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= Participial agreement is obligatory with 3rd-person clitics.

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- (8) Maria, ti= ho {vist-a /vist-o} in TV
Maria, 2SG.ACC have.1SG seen-F.SG /seen-M.SG in TV
'Maria, I saw you on TV.'
- (9) Pietro, ti= ho {vist-o /*vist-a} in TV
Pietro, 2SG.ACC have.1SG seen-M.SG seen-F.SG in TV
'Pietro, I saw you on TV.'

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In contrast, participial agreement is *optional* with 2nd-person clitics.

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So does **LEI** pattern with 2nd or 3rd person?

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- (10) (dottore,) **La**= ho {vist-a /*vist-o} in TV
doctor, **LEI**.ACC have.1SG seen-F.SG /seen-M.SG on TV
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(adapted from Maiden and Robustelli 2013:459)

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= **Both in its morphological and in its verbal-agreement behavior, **LEI** patterns as if it is 3rd person.**

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What the PCC prohibits, and what it doesn't

PCC effects vanish if one clitic is replaced with a stressed pronoun.

- (12) a. gli= hanno affidato te
3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted 2SG.STRESS
‘They entrusted you to him/her.’ ✓3>2
- b. ti= hanno affidato a lui/lei
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But notice there's no problem with 1st/2nd-person ACC clitics appearing in clitic clusters in general.

- (13) ti= ci= hanno portat-o, in tribunale
2SG.ACC LOC have.3PL brought-M.SG in court
‘They dragged you to court.’ ✓LOC + 2

The PCC and LEI (I)

The exact same pattern we saw with 2SG can be replicated with [LEI](#).

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The exact same pattern we saw with 2SG can be replicated with **LEI**.

First, the basic contrast:

- (14) a. **Gl**ie= la= hanno affidata/affidato
 LEI.DAT 3SG.F.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 ‘They entrusted her to you (formal).’ ✓**LEI**>3
- b. ***gl**ie= **La**= hanno affidata/affidato
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The PCC and LEI (II)

Second, the “repair” with stressed pronouns:

- (15) a. gli= hanno affidato Lei
 3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted.M.SG LEI.STRESS
 ‘They entrusted you to him.’ ✓3>LEI
- b. La= hanno affidata a lui
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- b. La= hanno affidata a lui
 LEI.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG to 3SG.M.STRESS
 ‘They entrusted you to him.’ ✓3>LEI

Third, the possibility of using the LEI ACC clitic in other clitic clusters.

- (16) dottore, ce= La= hanno portat-a, in tribunale?
 doctor LOC LEI.ACC have brought.F.SG in court
 ‘Doctor, did they drag you to court?’ ✓LOC + LEI

The PCC and LEI (III)

One wrinkle in the parallel: some variability in PCC effects with combinations of 1st and 2nd...

- (17) %mi= ti= hanno affidat- $\{o/a\}$
1SG 2SG have.3PL entrusted- $\{M.SG/F.SG\}$
%‘They entrusted you to me.’ / %‘They entrusted me to you.’
%1>2, %2>1

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 1SG 2SG have.3PL entrusted- $\{M.SG/F.SG\}$
 %‘They entrusted you to me.’ / %‘They entrusted me to you.’
 %1>2, %2>1

But there seems to be less variation with combinations of 1st and **LEI**:

- (18) (dottor Biagi,) *me= **La**= hanno affidat-a
 doctor Biagi, 1SG.DAT **LEI**.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 Doctor Biagi, they entrusted you to me. **X1>LEI**

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Against other approaches (I)

Morphological filters (e.g. Perlmutter 1971; Bonet 1991)

- $\chi_3 > 3$ should pattern with $3 > \text{LEI}$

(19) glie= la= hanno affidata
 3SG.DAT 3SG.F.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 'They entrusted her to him/to you (formal).'

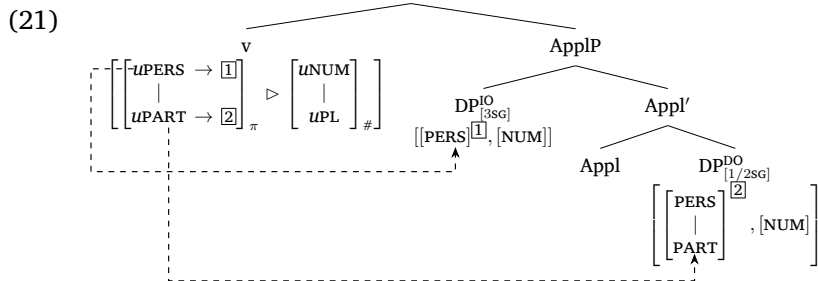
✓ $3 > 3$

(20) *glie= La= hanno affidata
 3SG.DAT LEI.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 'They entrusted you (formal) to her.'

✗ $3 > \text{LEI}$

Against other approaches (II)

Morphosyntactic—Coon & Keine 2021 as a representative example:

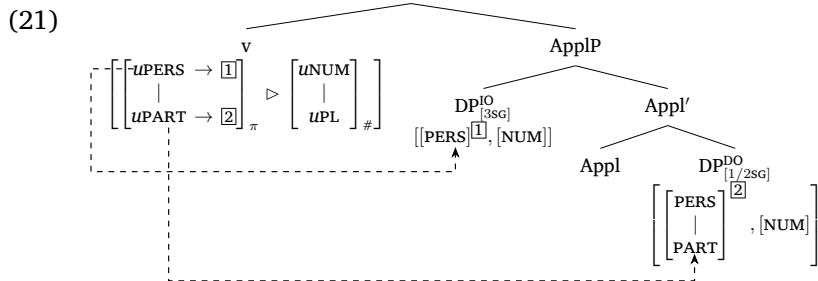


An articulated/omnivorous φ -probe (v) finds a goal with fewer person features (IO) *before* finding a goal with more person features (DO)

→ Potentially **unsolvable conflict** between locality and omnivorousness

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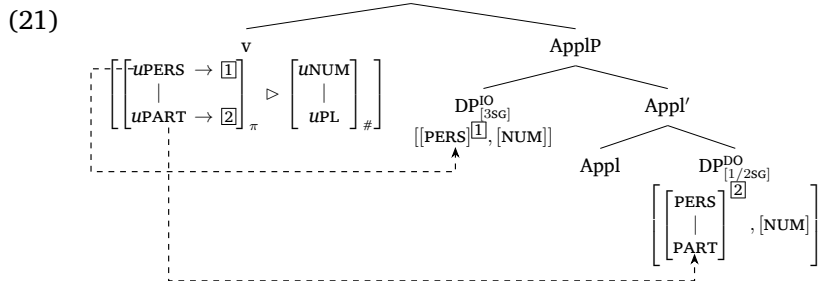
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But **LEI** behaves as non-PART for verbal-agreement purposes!

→ ✗ so we should expect it to induce no conflict → no PCC!

A syntactico-semantic alternative

- We suggest a **syntactico-semantic** account is on the right track
- The key property of such accounts is that they tie PCC effects to **interpretable** features, rather than to formal ones

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 - (e.g. we could have **LEI** bear both 3rd- and 2nd-person features, and stipulate that overt agreement tracks the former but Appl's satisfaction condition cares about the latter)
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 - Instead, the syntactico-semantic account predicts this naturally
- We are not married to any particular instantiation, but sketch how one recent proposal could handle the **LEI** data we've seen.
 - Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018
(see relatedly Charnavel and Mateu 2015)

Perspective encoding

Pancheva & Zubizarreta tie the PCC to the encoding of **perspective**.

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- (22) #Gianni_i credeva che gli_e_k= lo_i= avremmo
 Gianni believed that 3SG.DAT 3M.SG.ACC have.CDL.1PL
 presentato (alla regina_i)
 introduced.M.SG (to.the queen)
 ‘Gianni_i thought that we would introduce him_i to her_k (the queen_k).’ ‘Clitic Logophoric Effect’⁵

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In a nutshell: Indirect objects agreed with by Appl want to be *perspectival centers*, but so do DPs that bear interpretable 1st- and 2nd-person features, leading to a clash in PCC environments.

- LEI has interpretable 2nd-person features, so is expected to lead to the same clashes as 2nd-person pronouns
- Agree with Appl is key! That’s why the account is *syntactico-semantic*.

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A Possible Extension

For person-hierarchy effects in other kinds of ditransitives, we may then turn **LEI** into a diagnostic!

→ If **LEI** patterns with 2nd rather than 3rd person, that's an indication that agreement with Appl is involved!

Postal's (1989) "Fancy Constraint" in *faire-infinitif* (FI) causatives

- (23) {la= / *ti=} faranno pettinare a Carlo
 3SG.F.ACC 2SG.ACC make.FUT.3PL comb.INF to Carlo
 'They'll make Carlo comb her/*your hair.'
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Our observation:

- (24) **signor* Biagi, *La=* faranno pettinare a Carlo
mister Biagi **LEI**.ACC will.make.3PL comb.INF to Carlo
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→ Appl is involved in FI causatives! (Cf. Sheehan 2020; Deal 2024)

A Correct Prediction

Other person-hierarchy effects that clearly do *not* involve Appl are not expected to treat polite pronouns as 2nd person.

- Cf. Drummond and O'Hagan (2020): Not all person-hierarchy effects are (morpho)syntactic.

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(25) German assumed-identity contexts (Keine et al. 2019)

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|---------|------|
| a. | die | Zwillinge | sind | sie | |
| | the.NOM.PL | twins | be.3PL | 3PL.NOM | |
| | ‘The twins are (playing) them.’ | | | | ✓3>3 |
| b. | *die | Zwillinge | sind/seid | ihr | |
| | the.NOM.PL | twins | be.3PL/2PL | 2PL.NOM | |
| | ‘The twins are (playing) you guys.’ | | | | ✗3>2 |

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- a. die Zwillinge sind sie
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- b. *die Zwillinge sind/seid ihr
the.NOM.PL twins be.3PL/2PL 2PL.NOM
'The twins are (playing) you guys.' ✗3>2

Our observation:

- (26) die Zwillinge sind Sie
the.NOM.PL twins be.3PL SIE.NOM
'The twins are (playing) you (SG/PL).' ✓3>SIE

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- Other languages?

End

Thanks for listening!

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Appendix A: Imposters

Interestingly, nonpronominal imposter (including camouflage) nominals (Collins and Postal 2012; Servidio 2014) do not trigger PCC⁶ or Fancy Constraint effects in Italian.

- (27) [le vostre maestà]_i, glie_k= le_i=
 the.F.PL 2PL.POSS.F.PL majesty.PL 3SG.DAT 3PL.ACC
 hanno già presentate, a[l duca]_k?
 have.3PL already introduced.F.PL to.the duke
 ‘Have they already introduced Your Majesties to the duke?’
- (28) [le vostre altezze]_i, il professore
 the.F.PL 2PL.POSS.F.PL highness.PL the.M.SG. professor.M.SG
 le_i= farà esaminare all’ assistente
 3ACC.F.PL make.FUT.3SG examine.INF to.the.SG assistant
 ‘The professor will make the assistant examine Your Highnesses.’

⁶ Cf. Harris (1981:Ch. 3) about Georgian and Rezac (2011:297) about French.

Appendix A: Imposters (II)

- That PCC and Fancy Constraint effects do not obtain with camouflage items or imposters, unlike with **LEI**, suggests their relationship to 2nd person is represented differently.
- They are indeed treated as if they are 3rd-person in at least one case where **LEI** is not: coordination resolution.

(29) **Lei** e l'ambasciatore {vi= incontrerete
LEI.NOM and the.ambassador.M.SG 2PL.ACC meet.FUT.2.PL
 /*si= incontreranno} domani
 /REFL.3PL meet.FUT.3PL tomorrow
 'You (formal) and the ambassador will meet tomorrow.'

(30) la vostra maestà e l'ambasciatore
 the.F.PL 2PL.POSS.F.PL majesty and the.AMBASSADORE.M.SG
 {si= incontreranno /*vi= incontrerete} domani
 3.REFL meet.FUT.3PL /2.PL.ACC meet.FUT.2PL tomorrow
 'Your majesty and the ambassador will meet tomorrow.'

Appendix B: Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018

P-Constraint on phases α headed by an interpretable p(erson)-feature
 (Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018:1300)

- (31) The interpretable person feature is present on all heads of a certain functional category (default), unless restricted.
(Domain of application)
- (32) There must be an n -valued D located at the edge of α that enters into an agreement relation with the n -valued interpretable person feature on the head of α . n is [+ PROXIMATE] (default) or restricted to [+ PARTICIPANT] or [+ AUTHOR].
(P-Prominence)
- (33) There can be at most one DP in α eligible to agree with the interpretable p-feature on the head of α .
(P-Uniqueness)
- (34) If there is more than one DP that can agree with the interpretable p- feature on the head of α , the DP marked [+ AUTHOR] is the one that agrees.
(P-Primacy)

Appendix B: Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018 (II)

- [+PROXIMATE] is a feature motivated by proximate/obviative distinctions made in some languages, and falls in an implicational hierarchy with [\pm PARTICIPANT] and [\pm AUTHOR], the plus values of which entail [+PROXIMATE].
- To derive the Strong PCC, the setting in (a) is active, (b) has its default setting of [+PROXIMATE], and P-Uniqueness (c) is active (d is not).
- This rules in 3>3 configurations as long as the IO counts as [+PROXIMATE], but rules out 3>1 and 3>2: (b) requires that the IO be [+PROXIMATE], which is not possible for 3rd-person unless it occurs with another 3rd-person argument—and even if it did, P-Uniqueness (c) would be violated with 1st and 2nd direct objects, which are also inherently [+PROXIMATE].

Appendix C: German PCC

Anagnostopoulou (2008) discovered that German exhibits the PCC in embedded verb-final clauses when object pronouns precede the subject.

- (35) *weil dich ihm irgendwer vorgestellt hat
 because 2SG.ACC 3SG.M.DAT someone.NOM introduced has
 ‘because someone introduced you to him’ A2008:26

Unfortunately, 3PL is degraded in this position, for reasons we don’t understand. Nevertheless, formal **SIE** is also ungrammatical.

- (36) dass {es / ??/*sie} ihm dieser Mann
 that 3SG.N.ACC / 3PL.ACC 3SG.M.DAT the.NOM man
 gegeben hat
 given has
 ‘that this man has given it/*them to him’ (e.g. the book(s))

- (37) *dass Sie ihm dieser Mann vorgestellt hat.
 that SIE.ACC 3M.SG.DAT this man introduced has
 ‘that this man_i introduced you (polite) to him_j.’