

Polite Pronouns and the PCC*

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Abstract

The *Person-Case Constraint* (PCC) has played a substantial role in the development of linguistic theory in recent decades, particularly with respect to agreement and the encoding of person (Anagnostopoulou 2017a and references therein). While much of the generative literature on the PCC advances or assumes a (morpho)syntactic agreement-based account of PCC effects, we provide novel evidence from polite pronouns that challenges this perspective. Polite pronouns have the useful property that they exhibit a striking “mismatch” between the features expressed in their agreement and in their forms on the one hand, and what is interpreted on the other. They therefore provide an ideal testing ground for the predictions of morphosyntactic analyses of the PCC, which predict that third-person polite pronouns used for addressees should behave like other third-person arguments and should therefore fail to give rise to PCC effects. We find that this prediction is falsified in Italian for the polite pronoun *LEI*, which is used for formal address but is grammatically third-person, and for which PCC effects do obtain; we make similar observations for the related person hierarchy effect connected to the so-called Fancy Constraint (Postal 1989). We suggest that the PCC pattern with polite pronouns is more consistent with a syntacticosemantic, interpretation-based account of the PCC, such as that of Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2018), and sketch how this can be captured in their system. Lastly, we suggest that while PCC effects in ditransitives share a grammatical provenance across languages, other person hierarchy effects may not necessarily, and we show how these expectations are borne out with polite pronouns

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in Spanish (with *USTED*) and German (with *SIE*). This study has important implications for the analysis of person hierarchy effects and affirms the relevance of polite pronouns to the theory of agreement.

keywords: PCC, person hierarchy, agreement, interpretability

1 Introduction

Many languages exhibit person-based restrictions in their combination of object arguments in ditransitive environments, which have been investigated extensively under the label of Person-Case Constraint (PCC) effects¹ (Bonet 1994; Anagnostopoulou 2003, 2005, 2017a; Béjar and Rezac 2003; Bianchi 2006; Ormazabal and Romero 2007; Béjar and Rezac 2009; Adger and Harbour 2007; Nevins 2007; Preminger 2009, 2014; Rezac 2011; Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018; Stegovec 2019, 2020; Coon and Keine 2021; Foley and Toosarvandani 2022; Paparounas and Salzmann 2023; Deal 2024; among many others; see also Perlmutter 1971; Kayne 1975; Bonet 1991). This type of restriction is found in Italian (e.g. Bianchi 2006; D’Alessandro and Pescarini 2016): while clitic combinations of a third-person indirect object (IO) with a third-person direct object (DO) (henceforth abbreviated 3>3, with the IO preceding the DO) and 2>3 (1-a) are licit, clitic combinations of a third-person IO with a participant DO (such as second person) are not (1-b)-(1-c).

- (1) a. {Glie /te} la hanno affidat-a.
 3SG.DAT 2SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted-F.SG
 ‘They have entrusted her to her/him/you.’
 b. *{Gli(e) /le} {ti /te} hanno affidat{-o/-a}.
 3SG.DAT 2SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted-{M.SG/F.SG}
 Intended: ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’
 c. *{Ti /te} {gli(e) /le} hanno affidat{-o/-a}.
 2SG.ACC 3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted-{M.SG/F.SG}
 Intended: ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’ (cf. Bianchi 2006)

¹Throughout the present work, we use *Person-Case Constraint*/PCC in a fairly narrow sense, namely to refer to person hierarchy effects arising specifically between the direct and the indirect object of monoclausal ditransitive constructions. This is in contrast to some of the preceding literature, which employs this terminology more loosely to also subsume other kinds of person hierarchy restrictions.

PCC effects have played a substantial role in the theory of agreement and the encoding of person (Anagnostopoulou 2017a and references therein). While accounts vary greatly, most in the generative literature converge on the idea that PCC effects arise in the morphosyntax, such as via restrictions on Agree with multiple goals (Béjar and Rezac 2003; Anagnostopoulou 2005; Coon and Keine 2021; Deal 2024; among many others).

In the present work, we provide evidence from *polite pronouns* that challenges the received view that PCC effects with ditransitives should be attributed to morphosyntax.² Polite pronouns have the useful property that they exhibit a mismatch between the features expressed in their form and in their agreement on the one hand, and what is interpreted on the other. They thus provide an ideal testing ground for morphosyntactic analyses of the PCC, which predict that polite pronouns that are formally third-person but are used for addressees should behave like third-person arguments rather than second, thereby failing to give rise to PCC effects. We find that this prediction is falsified in Italian for the polite pronoun *LEI*, which, as we show, is used for formal address but is grammatically third-person, and for which PCC effects do obtain (as also briefly noted by D’Alessandro and Pescarini 2016). We further show that *LEI* patterns with second-person arguments for at least one other person hierarchy effect in Italian, namely Postal’s (1989) *Fancy Constraint*, an effect that has also been attributed to morphosyntactic mechanisms responsible for PCC effects (e.g. Sheehan 2020; Deal 2024).

We argue instead that the PCC pattern with *LEI* is more consistent with a syntacticosemantic analysis of the PCC, and we sketch how this can be captured in a system such as that of Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018. In identifying modularity-based differences between distinct accounts of the PCC, this study has important implications for the theory of person restrictions and provides a novel empirical tool to probe such

²We use the term *morphosyntax* loosely, to encompass both narrow syntax and “pure” morphology, as well as the interface between the two.

effects cross-linguistically. We further hypothesize that, while PCC effects with ditransitives across languages share a common grammatical source at the syntax/semantics interface, other person hierarchy effects outside of these environments may differ in their grammatical provenance (cf. Drummond and O’Hagan 2020), a hypothesis we support with cross-linguistic evidence from polite pronouns in Spanish and German. More broadly speaking, while the relevance of polite pronouns to the theory of agreement has been acknowledged in previous studies (see especially Wechsler and Hahm 2011; Ackema and Neeleman 2018), this study is, to our knowledge, novel in bringing them to bear on theories of person restrictions.

The organization of this work is as follows. In Section 2, we lay out the PCC pattern in Italian, which has been observed previously in the literature. In Section 3, we describe the morphosyntactic behavior of the polite pronoun *LEI*, which we demonstrate patterns with third person rather than second person both morphologically and in terms of verbal agreement. In Section 4, we show that PCC effects obtain with *LEI*, extend our observations to another type of person restriction, and contrast *LEI*’s PCC behavior with that of camouflage/imposter nominals. Section 5 then details how morphosyntactic accounts of the PCC are undermined by the data from *LEI*, and sketches one alternative syntacticosemantic account. Section 6 looks at some comparisons with other languages that have also been reported to display person hierarchy effects and have third-person polite pronouns. Section 7 considers alternative views of polite pronouns, situating them within the context of our findings for person hierarchy effects. Section 8 concludes.

2 The PCC in Italian

As mentioned in Section 1, PCC effects have been reported to obtain in Italian; see especially Bianchi 2006; D'Alessandro and Pescarini 2016 (on other Romance languages, see Perlmutter 1971; Bonet 1991, 1994, among many others). In Italian, object clitics typically precede a finite verb and can occur in clusters that include both the indirect and direct object, as in the combinations in (2) (adapted from Bianchi 2006), repeated from above. In these examples, the indirect object is represented with a dative clitic and the direct object is represented with an accusative clitic, with clitics reflecting person, number, as well as (modulo some syncretism) case and gender (see also fn. 4). As evident from (2), 2>3 and 3>3 clitic combinations are both grammatical.³

- (2) a. Te la hanno affidata.
 2SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 'They have entrusted her to you.'
 b. Gli_e la hanno affidata.
 3SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 'They have entrusted her to her/him.'

All (or at least the vast majority of) Italian speakers reject combinations of two argument clitics in which the indirect object is third person and the direct object is first or second person. This is illustrated for second person in (3), which is ungrammatical regardless of clitic ordering or clitic-allomorph selection.

- (3) a. *{Gli(e)/le} {ti/te} hanno {affidato/affidata}.
 3SG.DAT 2SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted.M.SG/entrusted.F.SG
 Intended: 'They have entrusted you to her/him.'

³For some clitics, elision of the clitic vowel is possible when a following adjacent verb begins with a vowel, including with the third-person singular feminine *la* and masculine *lo*, though it is not obligatory (see e.g. Maiden and Robustelli 2013:96-97). Because the unelided third-person forms more clearly reflect gender, we opt to include them throughout; to be clear, changing the elision status for our ungrammatical examples does not render them felicitous under the relevant interpretation in any of the cases discussed in the present article.

- b. *{Ti/te} {gli(e)/le} hanno {affidato/affidata}.
 2SG.ACC 3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted.M.SG/entrusted.F.SG
 Intended: ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’

PCC effects also hold in Italian for expressions in which the pronominal clitics are encliticized to an infinitive. As shown by the contrast in (4), a combination of a third-person IO with third-person DO is licit, while a combination of third-person IO with second-person DO is not (in any clitic order).

- (4) a. Intendo affidar glie la.
 intend.1SG entrust.INF 3SG.DAT /LEI.DAT 3SG.ACC
 ‘I intend to entrust her to her/him/you (formal).’
 b. *Intendo affidar {gli ti}/ {ti gli}.
 intend.1SG entrust.INF 3SG.DAT 2SG.ACC 2SG.ACC 3SG.DAT
 Intended: ‘I intend to entrust you to him.’

As is well-known, PCC effects vanish when one of the arguments is a stressed (or “tonic”) pronoun rather than a clitic, as observed by Bianchi (2006) for Italian (Kayne 1975:174 on French, Bonet 1994 on Catalan, Anagnostopoulou 2003 on Greek, and much subsequent literature). This is shown in (5).

- (5) a. Gli hanno affidato te.
 3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted.M.SG 2SG.STRESS
 ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’
 b. Ti hanno affidato a {lui /lei}.
 2SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted.M.SG to 3M.SG.STRESS /3.F.SG.STRESS
 ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’

Lastly, we note that while virtually all Italian native speakers reject clitic combinations of 3>1 and 3>2, some speakers also reject combinations of 1>2 and 2>1 (see e.g. Bianchi 2006:2027), as shown in (6).⁴ Such speakers are said to have a Strong PCC grammar, with speakers who accept these combinations—but not 3>1 or 3>2—having a Weak PCC grammar. In the present work, we focus on 3>2 combinations, though with

⁴Note that ACC and DAT marking for first and second are syncretic in this environment and the order of the clitics necessarily places first person before second person, regardless of which argument is the IO and which is the DO.

brief discussion of 1>2 combinations in Section 8.⁵

- (6) %Mi ti hanno affidato/affidata.
1SG 2SG have.3PL entrusted.M.SG/entrusted.F.SG
%‘They have entrusted you to me.’ / %‘They have entrusted me to you.’

3 The Polite Pronoun LEI

The Italian “polite” pronominal series identified here as LEI—in reference to its citation form—is used as a politeness or courtesy form in reference to singular addressees. (For a description of the sociopragmatic conditions under which LEI vs. other forms of address is used, see Maiden and Robustelli 2013:460-465.) In this section, we show that LEI patterns with the third-person feminine singular pronoun in terms of its morphology and in terms of its verbal agreement behavior, including as an object clitic.

LEI is morphologically identical to the third-person feminine singular series, as can be seen in Table 1. As reflected in the table, all of the elements in the LEI series are conventionally capitalized in the written language except for the possessive pronoun, while the third-person feminine forms are not (unless at the beginning of a sentence).

The third-person feminine behavior of LEI is not restricted to identity in pronominal forms. Italian distinguishes second person verbal agreement from third person, as shown in (7). Despite referring to an addressee, LEI triggers third-person agreement (8-a). Note further that, as a *pro*-drop language, Italian allows subjects to be non-overt; LEI may also be dropped, still triggering third-person agreement in politeness contexts (8-b).

⁵We set person hierarchy effects with reflexives to the side. For discussion of such effects in Italian, see Bianchi 2006; D’Alessandro and Pescarini 2016.

	NOM	ACC clitic	DAT clitic	stressed	POSS
1 SG	io	mi	mi/me	me	mio
2 SG	tu	ti	ti/te	te	tuo
3 SG.M	lui	lo	gli/glie	lui	suo
3 SG.F	lei	la	le/glie	lei	suo
LEI	Lei	La	Le/Glie	Lei	suo
1 PL	noi	ci	ci/ce	noi	nostro
2 PL	voi	vi	vi/ve	voi	vostro
3 PL.M	loro	li	%loro/%gli/%glie	loro	loro
3 PL.F	loro	le	%loro/%gli/%glie	loro	loro

Table 1: Personal Pronominal Series (cf. Maiden and Robustelli 2013:Ch. 6)

- (7) 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.'
- (8) a. Lei {è /*sei} qui.
LEI.NOM be.3SG /be.2SG here
'You (polite) are here.'
- b. Dottor Biagi, *pro* {è /#sei} qui!
Doctor Biagi, PRO be.3SG /be.PRS.2SG here
'Doctor Biagi, you're here!'

Reflexive elements are also distinguished between second and third person: in the second person, reflexive clitics are formally identical to non-reflexive clitics, whereas in the third person, reflexive clitics are realized with *si/se* (9).⁶ In the domain of reflexives, LEI again patterns with the third person (10). (A parallel contrast, omitted here, is found with stressed, non-clitic reflexives.)

- (9) a. {Ti /*si} vedi.
2SG.ACC /3SG.REFL see.2SG
'You see yourself.'
- b. {Si /#ti} vede.
3SG.REFL /2SG.ACC see.3SG
'She sees herself/he sees himself.'
- (10) (Lei) {si /#ti} vede.
LEI.NOM LEI.REFL /2SG.ACC see.3SG
'You see yourself.'

⁶Beyond reflexives, *si/se* is also found in a wider set of environments including impersonals; see D'Alessandro 2007 for an overview and for discussion.

LEI also behaves as a third-person argument and unlike a second-person singular argument for the purposes of clitic-cluster ordering (on the ordering of clitics in Romance, see Pescarini 2021 and references therein). In a combination of an accusative clitic with a locative, the second-person clitic *ti* must precede the locative clitic, as in (11-a), whereas the third person follows the locative, as in (11-b). LEI patterns again with the third person (11-c).

- (11) a. {Ti ci/ *ci ti} hanno portato.
 2SG.ACC LOC LOC 2SG.ACC have.3PL brought.M.SG
 ‘They have brought you there.’
 b. {Ce la/ *la ci} hanno portata.
 LOC 3F.SG.ACC 3F.SG.ACC LOC have.3PL brought.F.SG
 ‘They have brought her there.’
 c. {Ce La/ *La ci} hanno portata.
 LOC LEI.ACC LEI.ACC LOC have.3PL brought.F.SG
 ‘They have brought you (formal) there.’

As an object clitic, LEI is also treated as if it were a third-person feminine argument with respect to participle agreement. In Italian as in many Romance languages, verbal past participles can display agreement with accusative object clitics (see Kayne 1989; Belletti 2017; among many others). Crucially, though, such overt agreement is obligatory with third-person object clitics but optional with participant object clitics (Burzio 1986; Belletti 2017). This is illustrated in the contrast between (12) and (13). In the case of the second person, the form of the clitic (*ti*) does not vary depending on the gender of the referent, whereas agreement on the participle optionally varies: when the clitic refers to a woman, a feminine form can be employed but “default” masculine is also available; when referring to a man, the clitic is necessarily masculine because both the agreeing form and the default are masculine.⁷

⁷The optionality of participial gender agreement with participant clitics might at first seem related to the fact that gender contrasts are not overtly marked on such clitics (cf., e.g., La Fauci 1989:225fn13), thus suggesting an account in terms of gender impoverishment on the clitic optionally bleeding gender agreement with it. However, the phenomenon is in fact more general: for example, participial *number* agreement is also optional with plural participant clitics, despite the number contrast being overtly marked on

- (12) a. Maria, ti ho {vist-a /vist-o} ieri in TV.
 Maria, 2SG.ACC have.1SG seen-M.SG seen-F.SG yesterday in TV
 ‘Maria, I saw you on TV yesterday.’
 b. Pietro, ti ho {vist-o /*vist-a} ieri in TV.
 Pietro, 2SG.ACC have.1SG seen-M.SG seen-F.SG yesterday in TV
 ‘Pietro, I saw you on TV yesterday.’

As shown in (13), LEI as an accusative clitic patterns with third-person accusative clitics in that gender agreement is obligatory. Moreover, the agreement is for the formal features of LEI and not for the conceptual gender of the referent, unlike the second person. The gender agreement pattern thus suggests that the clitic LEI behaves as expected if it were a third-person feminine clitic.⁸

- (13) a. La ho {vist-a/*vist-o} ieri in TV.
 3SG.F.ACC have.1SG seen-F.SG/seen-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/seen-F.SG yesterday in TV
 ‘I saw him on TV yesterday.’
 (14) (Dottor Biagi,) La ho {vist-a /*vist-o} ieri in TV.
 Doctor Biagi, LEI.ACC have.1SG seen-F.SG /seen-M.SG yesterday on TV
 ‘Doctor Biagi, I saw you on TV yesterday.’ (also: ‘I saw her on TV yesterday.’)
 (adapted from Maiden and Robustelli 2013:459; confirmed with speakers)

The evidence from the pronominal morphology and the verbal agreement behavior of the polite series indicates that the formal features of LEI are that of the third-person feminine singular.

the clitics themselves in this case (1SG *mi* vs 1PL *ci*, 2SG *ti* vs 2PL *vi*). For syntactic analyses of the pattern, cf. also Guasti and Rizzi 2002:191; Belletti 2017:499; and Manzini 2023.

⁸A reviewer asks whether the split between optionality and obligatoriness in object agreement on the participle “really involve[s] the feature [PART], or rather could be attributed to more specific features like [SPKR] and [ADDR].” To the best of our knowledge, whenever a person-sensitive split emerges in participle agreement with object clitics in Romance, that split is always between first- and second-person clitics on the one hand and third-person clitics on the other—never first person alone *vs.* second and third, or second person alone *vs.* first and third (cf. Loporcaro 1998:42, 84, 100, 151; Loporcaro 2011; and Manzini and Savoia 2005:566ff). We take this crosslinguistic evidence to strongly suggest that the split is specifically sensitive to the feature [PART(ICIPANT)].

4 LEI and Person Hierarchy Effects

In this section, we demonstrate that PCC environments yield ungrammaticality with LEI. This is significant because approaches that attribute PCC effects to formal agreement rather than to the syntacticosemantic status of arguments predict that third-person polite pronouns should not give rise to PCC effects, because for the purposes of verbal agreement, these pronouns behave as if they were third person, despite being interpreted as referring to addressees. We contextualize this prediction of morphosyntactic accounts more explicitly in Section 5.

We first demonstrate the PCC effect with LEI and third-person clitics and show how it cannot be attributed to a morphological restriction on accusative LEI in clitic clusters (4.1). We extend our observations to another person hierarchy effect found with LEI in so-called *Fancy Constraint* environments (4.2). Lastly, we contrast LEI with imposters/camouflage DPs, which do not exhibit PCC effects in Italian (4.3).

4.1 LEI and the PCC

The example in (15), repeated from (3), displays the PCC effect: the dative clitic is third-person while the accusative clitic is second-person, and the result is ungrammatical.

- (15) *{Gli(e)/le} ti hanno {affidato/affidata}.
3SG.DAT 2SG.ACC have.3PL entrusted.M.SG/entrusted.F.SG
Intended: ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’

We now turn to the interaction between LEI and the PCC. First observe that LEI can appear as the dative clitic with a third-person accusative, as this is not a PCC environment. Like third-person dative clitics (both masculine and feminine), a dative LEI clitic is realized as *glie* in the context of a following clitic; the result is expectedly grammatical (16).

- (16) Glie la hanno affidata.
 {3SG.DAT/LEI.DAT} 3SG.F.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG
 ‘They have entrusted her to him/you (formal).’

Strikingly, when LEI appears as an accusative clitic with a dative third person, the result is ungrammatical (17), displaying a PCC effect comparable to the one observed for the second-person clitic (15). Note that there is nothing inherently ill-formed about the combination of the third-person dative with a third-person feminine accusative (which is string-identical to (16)).⁹

- (17) *Glie La hanno {affidata/affidato}.
 3SG.DAT LEI.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG/entrusted.M.SG
 Intended: ‘They have entrusted you (formal) to her/him.’

To ensure that the PCC effect with LEI is genuine, we offered the context in (18) to facilitate the target interpretation. Our consultants still found the relevant clitic combination ungrammatical.

- (18) ‘Oh avvocato, come sta? Non sa quanto mi è dispiaciuto che il mio medico L’abbia trattata male. Quello lì è proprio un cretino, sa?’
Oh, esteemed lawyer, how are you (formal)? You don’t know how sorry I was that my doctor treated you badly. He’s a real idiot, you know. . .

- a. *Io glie La avevo affidata sperando che La
 1SG.NOM 3SG.DAT LEI.ACC had.1SG entrusted.F.SG hoping that LEI.ACC
 curasse perbene (e invece. . .)
 cure.SBJV.IMPF.3SG properly and instead
 Intended: ‘I entrusted you to him hoping that he would take proper care of you (and instead. . .)’

While the sentences with (17) and (18) are formed with *affidare* ‘entrust’, we observe the same effect with the verb *raccomandare* ‘recommend’. When LEI is a dative clitic occurring with a third-person accusative, no PCC effect is expected and indeed the sen-

⁹The contrast between (16) and (17) also helps assuage the suspicion that the effect might have to do with an excess of markedness in the clitic cluster (on the assumption that DAT-ACC clitic clusters and polite LEI are both inherently marked). If that were the issue, we would expect 3>LEI to be no worse than LEI>3, contrary to fact.

tence is grammatical (19-a). When LEI is an accusative clitic occurring with a third person dative, a PCC effect obtains and the result is ungrammatical (19-b).

- (19) a. Glie la hanno raccomandata.
 LEI.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.3PL recommended.F.SG
 ‘They have recommended her to you.’
 b. *Glie La hanno raccomandata.
 3SG.DAT LEI.ACC have.3PL recommended.F.SG
 Intended: ‘They have recommended you (formal) to her/him.’

The PCC pattern with LEI observed for proclitics also extends to enclitics with infinitives, as shown in (20).

- (20) a. Intendo affidar {glie /Glíe} la.
 intend.1SG entrust.INF 3SG.DAT /LEI.DAT 3SG.ACC
 ‘I intend to entrust her to her/him/you (formal).’
 b. *Intendo affidar glie La.
 intend.1SG entrust.INF 3SG.DAT LEI.ACC
 Intended: ‘I intend to entrust you to her/him.’

As with PCC effects with the second person, these types of expressions are “repaired” if the ditransitive is not expressed with a combination of two clitics. In (21-a), the dative argument is a clitic while the accusative LEI appears as a stressed postverbal pronoun; the result is well-formed. In (21-b), LEI appears as an accusative clitic with the dative argument appearing postverbally in a prepositional phrase; the result is again grammatical.

- (21) a. Gli hanno affidato Lei.
 3SG.DAT have.3PL entrusted.M.SG LEI.STRESS
 ‘They have entrusted you to her/him.’
 b. La hanno affidata a lui.
 LEI.ACC have.3PL entrusted.F.SG to 3M.SG
 ‘They have entrusted you to him.’

Further confirmation for the PCC effect with LEI comes from corpus results from the Paisà corpus (Lyding et al. 2014). Because of the prescriptive preference to capi-

talize LEI in the written language, we can ask whether the clitic combination *glie-La* (3SG.DAT-LEI.ACC) is attested in this case-sensitive corpus, and compare it with the non-capitalized *glie-la* (3SG.DAT-3SG.F.ACC). While it is possible that some instances of non-capitalized *gliela* could be instances where the accusative is meant to be interpreted as polite LEI, our expectation is at least that there should be no instances of capitalized LEI in this position. A corpus search in 2024 yielded 580 hits for the string *gliela* tagged as a “clitic pronoun” but zero hits for *glieLa* (even without tags).

The restriction on the distribution of LEI cannot be attributed to an inability for LEI to participate in clitic clusters. LEI is shown above in (16) as a dative argument with a third-person accusative; we also specifically observe that the accusative form *La* can appear with a preceding locative clitic, as in (22-a), as well as with the impersonal clitic *si* or with the partitive clitic *ne* (both of which follow *La*), as in (22-b) and (22-c), respectively.¹⁰

- (22) a. Dottore, alla fine ce La hanno portata, in tribunale?
 doctor in.the end LOC LEI.ACC have.3PL brought.F.SG in court
 ‘Doctor, did they drag you to court in the end?’
 b. Onorevole, perché La si soprannomina così?
 congressperson, why LEI.ACC IMPRS refer.to.3SG this.way
 ‘Congressperson, how come they call you that?’
 c. Dottore, se gradisce uno spritz, Glie ne offro uno volentieri.
 doctor if like.3SG a spritz, LEI.DAT PARTITIVE offer.1SG one gladly

¹⁰Further evidence that the accusative LEI clitic is morphologically well-formed in clitic clusters comes from ethical dative contexts, which have been observed not to give rise to PCC effects (see Kayne 1975:171fn122 for the original observation from French, and Bianchi 2006 on Italian). LEI may appear felicitously as an accusative clitic in an ethical dative context; we find that first-person ethical datives are easiest to judge. Recall that Strong PCC Italian speakers do not accept combinations of participant clitics (see also (55-a)). In contrast, all speakers, including Strong PCC speakers, accept a combination of a dative first-person and an accusative second-person clitic in an ethical dative construction, like that seen in (i-a). Perhaps unsurprisingly, LEI in accusative position is well-formed in the ethical dative construction (i-b), including for Strong PCC speakers.

- (i) a. Come mi ti hanno conciato?
 how 1SG.ETH.DAT 2SG.ACC have.3PL ill.treated.M.SG
 ‘How badly did they mess you up?’
 b. Come me La hanno conciata?
 how 1SG.ETH.DAT LEI.ACC have.3PL ill.treated.F.SG
 ‘How badly did they mess you (formal) up?’

‘Doctor, if you’d like a spritz, it’d be my pleasure to buy you one.’

Based on the preceding evidence, we conclude that the third-person polite pronoun LEI patterns with second person clitics in inducing PCC effects, rather than with third person.

4.2 LEI and the Fancy Constraint

We now extend our observations about person restrictions from PCC effects to the so-called Fancy Constraint. Two analytic causative constructions have been identified in the literature on Romance, often referred to as *faire par* and *faire infinitif* causatives; see Kayne 1975; Burzio 1986; Guasti 1996; Folli and Harley 2007; among many others. In Italian, the two are distinguished by how a causee is introduced: within a PP headed by *da* ‘from’ in the *faire par* construction but with a dative clitic or a PP headed by *a* ‘to’ in the *faire infinitif* construction (23).

- (23) a. Micol fa pettinare Giulia da Carlo.
 Micol make.3SG comb.INF Giulia by Carlo
 ‘Micol is making Carlo comb Giulia’s hair.’
 b. Micol fa pettinare Giulia a Carlo.
 Micol make.3SG comb.INF Giulia to Carlo
 ‘Micol is making Carlo comb Giulia’s hair.’

(adapted, D’Alessandro and Pescarini 2016:275)

As noted by D’Alessandro and Pescarini (2016), a person hierarchy effect can be found with the *faire infinitif* construction in Italian (but not for *faire par*)—an effect that Postal (1989) first discovered in French and termed the *Fancy Constraint* (see also Bonet 1991; Sheehan 2020). In particular, there is a contrast between the acceptability of a third-person accusative clitic vs. a first- or second-person clitic. The contrast is illustrated in (24); notice that the effect obtains even though the causee argument is not a clitic in the example, a point which has been taken to indicate that the PCC is not strictly linked to clusters with clitics or weak pronouns (e.g. Sheehan 2020). (We note that our consultants tend to find the “baseline”-type case in (24) marked to begin with, though

there is nevertheless a sharp person-based contrast.)

- (24) Micol {la / *ti} fa pettinare a Carlo.
 Micol 3SG.F.ACC 2SG.ACC make.3SG comb.INF to Carlo
 ‘Micol is making Carlo comb her/*your hair.’
 (adapted, D’Alessandro and Pescarini 2016:276)

As with the PCC effect found with ditransitives, we find that LEI patterns with the second person and not the third person in triggering a person hierarchy effect with the *faire infinif*, as shown in (25). As with the PCC, the hierarchy effect vanishes when the argument LEI is expressed with a pronoun rather than a clitic (26).

- (25) *Signor Biagi, Micol La fa pettinare a Carlo.
 Signor Biagi Michol LEI.ACC make.3SG comb.INF to Carlo
 Intended: ‘Signor Biagi, Michol is making Carlo comb your hair.’

- (26) Micol fa pettinare {te/Lei} a Carlo.
 Micol make.3SG comb.INF 2SG.ACC.STRESSED/LEI.STRESSED to Carlo
 ‘Micol makes Carlo comb your/your(polite) hair.’

4.3 *Imposters and the PCC in Italian*

We can also contrast the PCC effect from LEI with what is observed with non-pronominal camouflage nominals (which involve an overt participant possessor) and non-camouflage imposters (which do not). Both are like third-person polite pronouns in that they are grammatically third-person for verbal agreement, but appear to represent their relationship with participant pronouns differently from polite pronouns; see Collins and Postal 2012 for one view of imposter structure, and Servidio 2014 on imposters specifically in Italian. We show that LEI behaves differently from non-pronominal imposters in Italian, both in terms of PCC effects and in terms of other agreement behavior. (See also Rezac 2011:297 for the observation that French imposters do not induce PCC effects.)¹¹ This

¹¹A related observation for Georgian comes from Harris (1981:Ch. 3), who points out that Georgian person hierarchy effects in ditransitives vanish when a (reflexive-looking) camouflage nominal is used in place of a participant pronoun, which agrees as if it is grammatically third person.

evidence suggests that the syntacticosemantic representation of LEI as (fundamentally) second person is not shared with imposters, giving rise to divergent behavior in PCC contexts.

We first show the absence of a PCC effect with the camouflage item *Vostro Onore* ‘2PL.POSS honor’ (with the possessive also agreeing in gender and number with the noun *Onore*). In order to test this item within a PCC context, we employ a left-dislocated topic structure as in (27): the camouflage item *Vostro Onore* appears as a left-dislocated topic, which is resumed by a third-person accusative clitic agreeing with the masculine gender and singular number of the topic. (Because it is masculine, it is clear that the clitic is not polite LEI, which would appear as a feminine clitic.) To make this a PCC context, a dative third-person clitic is also present, such that, if the camouflage item were treated as second-person, a PCC effect would be induced. In contrast, we find that the camouflage item, unlike LEI, does not give rise to a PCC effect.

- (27) [Vostro Onore]_i, glie_k lo_i hanno già presentato,
 2PL.POSS.F.PL honor 3SG.DAT 3SG.M.ACC have.3PL already introduced.M.SG
 al[l’ ambasciatrice]_k?
 to.the ambassador.F.SG
 ‘Have they already introduced Your Honor to the ambassador?’

We also find that camouflage items do not give rise to violations of the Fancy Constraint in Italian. In (28), the camouflage item *Vostro Onore* ‘your honor’ is again put into a left-dislocated topic structure, and is resumed by an accusative clitic in the *faire infinitif* construction. The expression is grammatical.

- (28) [Vostro Onore]_i, il professore lo_i farà esaminare
 2PL.POSS honor the.M.SG. professor 3ACC.M.SG make.FUT.3SG examine.INF
 all’ assistente.
 to.the.SG assistant
 ‘The professor will make the assistant examine Your Honor.’

We can replicate the same pattern with the non-camouflage imposter *il signor Duca*

‘the lord Duke’. (Once again, because the imposter nominal is masculine, it is clear that the clitic is not polite LEI.) In contrast to both second person and LEI, no person hierarchy effect arises with the imposter.

- (29) a. [Il signor Duca]_i, glie_k lo_i hanno già
the.M.SG mister duke 3SG.DAT 3M.SG.ACC have.3PL already
presentato, al[l’ ambasciatrice]_k?
introduced.M.SG to.the ambassador.F.SG
‘Have they already introduced the Duke (you) to the ambassador?’
b. [Il signor Duca]_i, lo_i faranno esaminare all’
the.M.SG mister duke 3M.SG.ACC make.FUT.3PL examine.INF to.the
assistente.
assistant
‘They will make the assistant examine the Duke (you).’

That PCC and Fancy Constraint effects do not obtain with camouflage items or non-pronominal imposters, unlike with LEI, suggests that their relationship to second-person address is represented differently. While we take no firm stance on the representation of camouflage or imposter DPs, we would like to highlight that they do indeed diverge in their behavior from LEI in that they are treated as if they are third-person in at least one other case where LEI is not. It has previously been noted in the literature on coordination resolution that resolved agreement is sensitive to interpreted features of the nominals, as evidenced especially by cases where formal features diverge from what is interpreted (e.g. Wechsler 2008; Adamson and Anagnostopoulou 2024; among others). We observe that this is true for coordination of LEI with a third-person nominal (30), which yields obligatory second-plural resolved agreement (as is also observed when the second-person informal pronoun is used instead of LEI). In contrast, the camouflage nominal and the imposter are compatible with third-person resolved agreement when coordinated with another third-person nominal, with the alternative second or first person agreement being ungrammatical or at least severely degraded (cf. Servidio 2014; Loporcaro 2024).

- (30) Lei e l' ambasciatore {vi incontrerete /*si
 LEI.NOM and the ambassador.M.SG 2PL.ACC meet.FUT.2.PL /REFL.3PL
 incontreranno} domani.
 meet.FUT.3PL tomorrow
 'You (formal) and the ambassador will meet tomorrow.'
- (31) Vostro Onore e l' ambasciatore di Svezia {si
 2PL.POSS.M.SG honor and the ambassador.M.SG of Sweden 3.REFL
 incontreranno /*vi incontrerete} domani.
 meet.FUT.3PL /2.PL.ACC meet.FUT.2PL tomorrow
 'Your Honor and the ambassador from Switzerland will meet tomorrow.'
- (32) Il signor Duca e l' ambasciatore di Svezia {si
 the.M.SG mister duke and the ambassador.M.SG of Sweden 3.REFL
 incontreranno /*vi incontrerete} domani.
 meet.FUT.3PL /2.PL.ACC meet.FUT.2PL tomorrow
 'The Duke (you) and the ambassador from Switzerland will meet tomorrow.'

The contrast between LEI and imposters for the PCC suggests that PCC effects do not arise pragmatically (in a broad sense), since both types of nominals are ultimately used for reference to addressees, yet not all addressee-referring expressions give rise to PCC effects. The contrast is instead in line with an account in which the syntacticosemantic representation of polite pronouns is necessarily second person in a way that imposters and camouflage nominals need not be.

5 LEI and the Theory of the PCC

We argue that the evidence from Italian polite LEI is incompatible with morphosyntactic analyses of the PCC, and instead favors a syntacticosemantic account. While space considerations preclude a more comprehensive evaluation of PCC accounts, we consider here a few representative examples from the recent literature.¹² In essence, our view is

¹²We briefly note that the evidence from polite pronouns also poses a challenge to an analysis in which PCC effects are fundamentally morphological in character, as in Perlmutter 1971; Bonet 1991, 1994. As described in Section 3, LEI is formally identical to the third-person feminine singular pronoun across all of its realizations, including as an object clitic, and verbal agreement also treats it as third-person. If LEI is

that for theories that derive PCC effects from the mechanics of Agree, because LEI behaves as a third-person argument for purposes of agreement (as shown in Section 3), it is expected to obviate PCC effects, contrary to fact (as shown in Section 4).

For concreteness, we assume that polite pronouns have two sets of ϕ -features, which are both present in the narrow syntax, one of which is interpretable and the other of which is uninterpretable. On this type of dual-feature system and related systems, see Wurmbrand 2017; Smith 2015, 2017, 2021; Anagnostopoulou 2017b; Messick 2023a,b; Adamson and Anagnostopoulou 2024; Adamson 2024; among others; on polite pronouns in particular, Wurmbrand 2016 and relatedly Despić 2017; Puškar-Gallien 2019.¹³ We assume LEI carries uninterpretable third-person, feminine, and singular features—consistent with its verbal agreement behavior—and interpretable second-person and singular features (with masculine and feminine genders both being viable depending on whether the addressee identifies as a man or as a woman)—consistent with the polite pronoun being confined to singular addressees. We postpone discussion of alternative analyses of polite pronouns to Section 7.¹⁴

treated morphologically as though it is third person, any PCC-inducing morphological filter or constraint that restricts the distribution of second person should not be applicable to LEI, contrary to fact.

¹³This dual-system is also similar to that of Wechsler and Zlatić 2003; Hahm 2010; Wechsler and Hahm 2011, but with the division being between *interpretable* and *uninterpretable* values of ϕ -features, which are sent to LF and PF respectively. See Puškar-Gallien 2019; Kaur 2025 on agreement with honorific nominals for an alternative analytic possibility for having two distinct sets of features present in the syntax.

¹⁴That the polite pronoun's interpretable features are represented in narrow syntax is supported by the fact that some agreement targets, including predicative adjectives, agree with these interpreted values: adjectives (as well as subject-agreeing participles) reflect gender agreement with the conceptual gender of the addressee, rather than with the formal, feminine gender of LEI (see Wechsler and Hahm 2011 on this pattern cross-linguistically). This can be observed in the examples in (i): the predicative adjective agrees with the subject, yet despite the subject being (formally feminine) LEI, agreement is masculine when LEI refers to a man, but feminine when LEI refers to a woman. See Wurmbrand 2016 for one view of how agreement targets either uninterpretable or interpretable features of polite pronouns.

- (i) a. Dottor Biagi, Lei è così {buono/ #buona}.
 Doctor Biagi LEI.NOM be.3SG so good.M.SG/ good.F.SG
 'Doctor Biagi, you are so good.' (male addressee)
 b. Dottoressa Biagi, Lei è così {buona/ #buono}.
 Doctor Biagi, LEI.NOM be.3SG so good.F.SG/ good.M.SG
 'Doctor Biagi, you are so good.' (female addressee)

We first critically evaluate several morphosyntactic accounts of the PCC in light of the polite pronoun evidence (5.1) before turning to a sketch of a syntacticosemantic account (5.2).

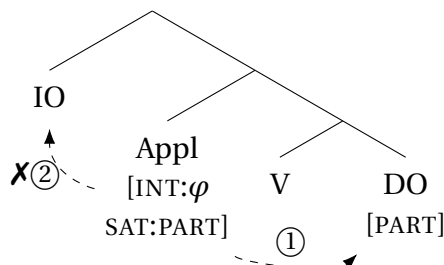
5.1 *Morphosyntactic Analyses of the PCC*

5.1.1 *Deal 2024*

As one representative example, consider Deal’s (2024) Interaction/Satisfaction model, according to which a Probe may enter into an Agree relation with multiple Goals, interacting with every Goal in its domain until its “satisfaction” conditions are met. Deal analyzes PCC effects in this model as resulting from i) probes having a satisfaction condition such as [PART(ICIPANT)], ii) an Agree relation being necessary for argument cliticization, and iii) the relevant probe interacting with direct objects before indirect objects.

A derivation is schematized in the tree in (33): here, an Appl head is specified to interact with elements bearing ϕ -features, and to probe until it finds a feature [PART]. In this example, the direct object bears [PART], which the Appl probe can agree with, thereby licensing argument cliticization of the direct object. However, because the probe interacted with [PART] on the direct object, its satisfaction condition has been met and it cannot continue, thereby bleeding an Agree relation with the indirect object. This results in a (Strong) PCC effect, and the indirect object cannot be cliticized.

(33)



Consider now how LEI is expected to behave in this account. Recall that LEI is treated

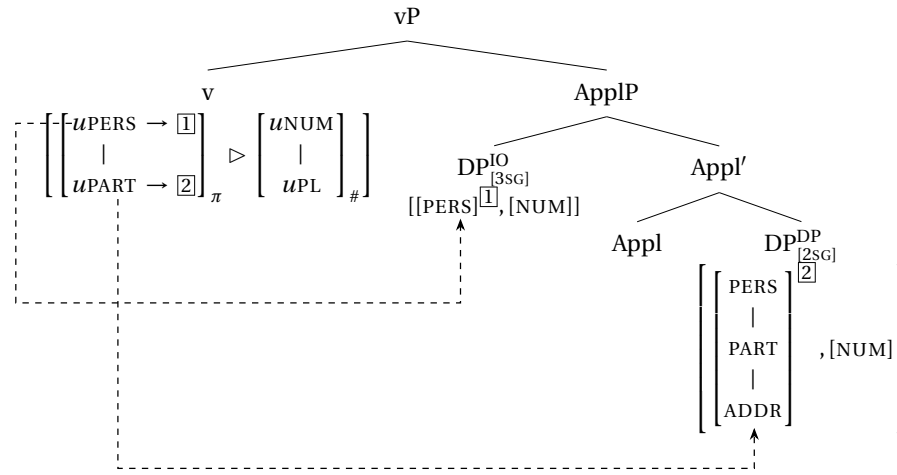
as third-person for verbal agreement, including as an object clitic. Under this analysis, the probe should agree with a direct object LEI as if it is third-person and it should therefore fail to be satisfied, as it does not see a [PART] feature. It should therefore be able to agree with the indirect object (as in licit 1>3, 2>3, and 3>3 constructions) and no PCC effect should obtain, contrary to fact.¹⁵

5.1.2 Coon and Keine 2021

As another recent representative, consider the *Feature Gluttony* analysis from Coon and Keine (2021). In their analysis, PCC effects can arise when a probe enters into an Agree relation with multiple goals, as this can lead to crash-inducing conflicts for subsequent operations such as clitic movement and morphological realization. In their system, this situation arises for an articulated probe (i.e. one with multiple feature segments) if it first encounters an argument with fewer person features, followed by an argument with a richer set of person features. This is schematized in (34) for a 3>2 environment.

¹⁵A reviewer observes that the Interaction/Satisfaction model could be reconciled with the Italian data on the assumption that LEI bears some feature other than [PART] that is also able to satisfy the probe. When it comes to the identity of this feature, however, it seems to us that there are only two conceivable options: it could be either some LEI-specific politeness feature (e.g. [HON]) or, as the reviewer suggests, a feature like Pancheva & Zubizarreta's (2018) [+PROXIMATE] (on which see Section 5.2 below). On the one hand, the first option would lack independent motivation (there is no evidence that an [HON] feature as such is targeted by agreement in Italian, nor that it can satisfy an agreement probe) and it would leave it unexplained why LEI should pattern with other pronouns bearing interpretable [PART] features. (See related discussion of Rezac's (2011) [PERSON] feature in Section 5.1.3.) On the other hand, the [+PROXIMATE] option would lead us to what is effectively a syntacticosemantic account, where the features pertaining to the interpretation of LEI factor into the PCC while the features expressed in agreement do not.

(34)



In Coon and Keine’s system, a “gluttonous” probe bearing multiple feature sets is not itself a problem, but rather, it can lead to problems later in the derivation for operations that refer to the feature sets being copied onto the probe—such as cliticization, which they assume to be obligatory in the case of an Agree relation with a clitic-doubling probe (p. 671). For the 3>2 situation schematized in (34), cliticization to the probing head would fail, because the syntax can neither cliticize both arguments simultaneously (which is impossible for a binary-operating Merge) nor can it do so sequentially, as this would produce a step in the derivation where one argument is indeed cliticized but the obligation to cliticize the other argument is flouted.

Since verbal agreement treats LEI as third-person, there is no reason to believe that its interpretable participant features are visible to the Agree operation; thus it should pattern with 3>3 environments, which are grammatical. For Coon and Keine, 3>3 configurations first involve a π -probe, which is not gluttonous because the lower direct object does not bear more person features than the already identified indirect object. Subsequently, after cliticization has rendered the indirect object invisible to subsequent Agree relations (following Anagnostopoulou 2003; Béjar and Rezac 2003; Preminger 2009), a #-probe agrees with the direct object. In their system, LEI and other third-person polite pronouns should pattern as third-person arguments, thereby allowing double clitic

configurations, contrary to what we find with LEI.

5.1.3 *The Person Licensing Condition*

A distinct but related type of syntactic approach is pursued by Béjar and Rezac (2003); see also Béjar and Rezac 2009; Preminger 2009; Rezac 2011; Preminger 2014, and see Coon and Keine 2021 for criticism. According to such an account, PCC effects arise as a result of a Person Licensing Condition, which requires first/second-person features to be licensed via an Agree relation. In Béjar and Rezac's analysis, first/second-person direct objects violate the Person Licensing Condition when they occur with an indirect object, thereby yielding a PCC effect: a π -probe merged higher than both objects first sees the more local indirect object, and consequently cannot agree in person with the direct object, thereby failing to license it. (A second #-probe can Agree with the first/second-person direct object, but not in person, and therefore cannot license it.)

In Béjar and Rezac's system, the fact that LEI gives rise to PCC effects as a direct object in ditransitives suggests that LEI behaves as a participant for the purposes of the Person Licensing Condition. The problem, however, is that as we have seen, when appearing as a direct object without an indirect object, LEI is agreed with (and presumably thereby licensed) as though it is third-person. In order to account for the behavior of LEI with respect to both the PCC and ordinary verbal agreement, Béjar and Rezac would thus have to assume that Agree licenses the interpretable ϕ -features on LEI even though it copies its uninterpretable features. Notice, however, that this is effectively a syntacticosemantic account: the interpretable person features factor into the PCC while the features expressed in agreement do not.

A variant of this analysis comes from Rezac (2011), who formulates the Person Case Constraint as being about (case-)licensing a feature [+PERSON] on the (would-be) accusative object (p. 98). This type of analysis can accommodate hierarchy effects that extend to other non-participant nominals, including (third-person) reflexives in French,

which also induce a PCC-type effect in accusative object position (Rezac 2011:2; see related discussion of Spanish in Perlmutter 1971). The idea is that [+PERSON] can be cross-linguistically variable to some degree in what types of nominals it is assigned to, such that reflexives in one language carry [+PERSON] and therefore induce PCC effects, while in another language, reflexives do not bear such features and therefore fail to give rise to PCC effects (e.g. p. 299).

The same logic for [+PERSON] is applied to third-person animate nominals. As observed by Ormazabal and Romero (2007) (also in their antecedent work), Spanish speakers of so-called *leísta* varieties distinguish between accusative clitics that are used for inanimates (*lo/la*—masculine singular and feminine singular, respectively) vs. those that are used for animates (*le*, syncretic with the dative); a hierarchy effect obtains only with the animate (35). This can be made sense of within Rezac’s system if third-person animates in Spanish (but not necessarily in other languages) are assigned the feature [+PERSON].

- (35) Te {lo /*le} di.
 2SG.DAT 3SG.ACC 3SG.ACC gave
 ‘I gave it/*him to you.’ Spanish *leísta* varieties (Ormazabal and Romero 2007:321)

In this type of analysis, the PCC effects observed with LEI could be attributed to the obligatory presence of [+PERSON] on polite pronouns. This is in fact what Rezac (2011:298-299) suggests for the third-person polite pronoun in Spanish USTED (including in *laísta* varieties), which is also briefly noted to give rise to PCC effects; see further discussion of Spanish in Section 6.

While this type of analysis can be made to work mechanically, because Rezac’s [+PERSON] feature is not tied explicitly to exponence or to interpretation, its presence on specific kinds of elements outside of participant pronouns is essentially arbitrary (Rezac 2011:299); as far as we can tell, [+PERSON] is stipulated in order to induce PCC effects.

Absent other types of evidence for [+PERSON] within a language, it is difficult to see how a learner would come to posit this feature, and if learners are in fact free to posit it or not, we may expect variation across speakers and across languages with third-person polite pronouns, with only some speakers opting to assign polite pronouns [+PERSON], contrary to what we find with LEI.

5.2 *Towards a Syntacticosemantic Account*

We suggest instead that a syntacticosemantic account of the PCC is on the right track. We view the fundamental property needed from such an account to be that these effects are tied to conflicts arising from interpretable person features rather than being inherently tied to the formal features that are overtly reflected in morphosyntactic agreement. While it is not our objective to argue for a particular implementation, we sketch how one recent account could contend with the PCC effects found with LEI.

We take a recent representative of the syntacticosemantic perspective to be the proposal by Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2018) (henceforth P&Z; see also Charnavel and Mateu 2015 and Stegovec 2019, 2020). P&Z attribute PCC effects to the encoding of point-of-view centers within a phase defined by some argument-introducing verbal head—for them, Appl. In brief, this head enters into an Agree relation, necessarily with *interpretable* person features, in order to establish its goal as a point-of-view center.

P&Z propose that PCC effects—including those referred to as *Strong*, *Weak*, *Strictly Descending*, and so on—are captured by the P(erson)-Constraint in (36). Their P-Constraint has several components, which are all subject to variation in parametric setting (see also Zubizarreta and Pancheva 2017).

- (36) *P-Constraint on phases α headed by an interpretable p(erson)-feature*
- a. The interpretable person feature is present on all heads of a certain functional category (default), unless restricted. (*Domain of application*)
 - b. 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*)
- c. There can be at most one DP in α eligible to agree with the interpretable p-feature on the head of α . (*P-Uniqueness*)
 - d. 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*) (P&Z:1300)

In this system, [+PROXIMATE] is a feature motivated by proximate/obviative distinctions made in some languages, and “proximate arguments are the ones suitable to be perspectival centers” (p. 1300). It falls in an implicational hierarchy with the person features [$\pm$ PARTICIPANT] and [$\pm$ AUTHOR], the plus values of which imply the presence of [+PROXIMATE]. (In other words, all first person and second person arguments are [+PROXIMATE], being suitable perspective-holders, but only some third-person arguments can be [+PROXIMATE], namely those that occur in the same domain as another third-person argument.)

To derive the Strong PCC, whereby first- and second-person arguments are altogether banned from the direct object position in a double object construction, 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 as follows: (b) requires that the IO be [+PROXIMATE], which is not possible for third-person unless it occurs with another third-person argument, and even if it did, P-Uniqueness (c) would be violated with 1st and 2nd direct objects, which are also inherently [+PROXIMATE]. For the Weak PCC, P-Uniqueness is not active, and thus 1>2 and 2>1 are possible for this grammar type, since there is no issue with having multiple arguments with [+PROXIMATE] in the same domain.

We now turn to PCC effects with LEI. The polite pronoun should bear [+PROXIMATE] by virtue of having interpretable second person features (and as shown above in (16),

LEI can indeed serve as an IO as expected). Considering the Strong PCC grammar, LEI in DO position should be ungrammatical with a third-person IO because i) the IO cannot be [+PROXIMATE] in the context of (what is interpreted as) a non-third person argument, and ii) even if the IO could be [+PROXIMATE], this would lead to the co-occurrence of two [+PROXIMATE] arguments, thereby violating P-Uniqueness. For the Weak PCC grammar, (i) still holds, thereby also giving rise to a PCC effect for $3 > \text{LEI}$.^{16,17}

The P&Z account shares with morphosyntactic analyses the idea that Agree-based relations are complicit in the derivation of PCC effects. It is therefore able to capture syntactic aspects of the phenomenon, such as the fact that PCC effects discriminate between clitics and stressed pronouns, under the widely held view that cliticization is a consequence of an agreement relation (see Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018:1321-1324 for discussion, and Anagnostopoulou 2003; Béjar and Rezac 2003; Preminger 2019; Coon and Keine 2021; Deal 2024; among others).

A crucial difference between the type of syntacticosemantic analysis offered by P&Z and a morphosyntactic analysis, however, is that the agreement relation has an interpretive motivation (e.g. to identify point-of-view centers) and thus the person features that are considered are naturally the interpretable ones rather than the formal features that come to be expressed overtly in verbal agreement morphology.¹⁸ This is thus where an

¹⁶P&Z actually propose that P-Uniqueness is evaluated by having two person features on Appl: one that is interpretable and agrees with the IO and one that is uninterpretable and agrees with the the DO. Since this mechanism is meant to evaluate whether there are multiple potential point-of-view centers, we would assume that the unvalued probe is instead sensitive to the interpretable features of the DO (thereby inducing a PCC effect with LEI).

¹⁷Though P&Z do not discuss the Fancy Constraint, we suggest that their analysis can be extended to this type of person hierarchy effect. Recall from (24) that in the *faire infinitif*, a third-person causee could co-occur with an accusative clitic that is third-person but not second-person, and that LEI patterned with the second-person. In the detailed structural analysis of *faire infinitifs* in Folli and Harley 2007 (following insights also from antecedent literature), causative structure is introduced by a head v_{caus} (not present in the *faire par* construction, which also does not give rise to Fancy Constraint effects), and embeds a vP . It could be that the v_{caus} head is like Appl in P&Z's system, establishing another point-of-view domain. Alternatively, we may follow Sheehan (2020) and Deal (2024) in taking *faire infinitif* causatives to directly involve Appl itself rather than v_{caus} . We leave the question open.

¹⁸A different syntacticosemantic agreement relation is proposed to account for PCC effects by Stegovec

analysis of the PCC as a syntax/semantics interface issue can make sense of the polite pronoun data but where morphosyntactic accounts falter.

Potential further support for this type of approach comes from what Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2018) refer to as the the Clitic Logophoric Restriction (CLR). As discussed by P&Z, following observations from Roca (1992) and Charnavel and Mateu (2015) (see relatedly Ormazabal and Romero 2007 and Bhatt and Šimík 2009), an accusative clitic referring to (but not necessarily c-commanded by) an attitude holder is ungrammatical in the context of a third-person dative clitic in Spanish and in French, but is reported to be grammatical when the dative is first or second person. While the CLR is discussed in the context of these other languages, we observe that the same generalization holds for at least some Italian speakers: in (37) a third-person dative with a third-person accusative attitude holder induces a CLR effect, while for some speakers (though not all we consulted), a second-person dative does not (37)-(38).

- (37) *Maria_i credeva che qualcuno glie la_i avrebbe
 Maria believed that someone 3SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.CDL.3SG
 raccomandata (al capo) per la promozione.
 recommended to.the boss for the promotion
 ‘Maria_i believed that someone recommended her_i to the boss for the promotion.’
 (adapted from Charnavel and Mateu 2015:672)

(2019, 2020), who suggests that clitic pronouns enter the syntactic derivation as *minimal pronouns* (in Kratzer’s 2009 sense), whose interpretable person features must either be valued via Agree with a verbal head or be valued as third-person by default (see especially Stegovec 2020:273–276).

According to this account, PCC effects arise because “in a structure with two *pro_{DF}* [...] only the higher *pro_{DF}* can receive a [π] value from [the verbal head]. In doing so, it blocks [π]-valuation of the lower *pro_{DF}*, which then gets a default value, that is 3P” (p. 274). In the case of DO polite pronouns, valuation by the verbal head of the IO’s person features blocks valuation of the DO’s person features, resulting in interpretable default third-person, inconsistent with the addressee interpretation. The account can therefore correctly capture the PCC behavior observed with polite pronouns.

While the implementation is different, Stegovec’s view is similar to that of P&Z in that for him, valued person features on the verbal head are present to encode “speech act participant perspective” (p. 276). Stegovec follows Charnavel and Mateu 2015 in suggesting an interpretability-based view is supported by PCC effects being ameliorated in non-*de-se* environments: Stegovec notes this for Slovenian, while Charnavel and Mateu note this for Spanish and French. See brief discussion of non-*de-se* environments in Italian in Section 8.

- (38) %Maria_i credeva che qualcuno te la_i avrebbe
 Maria believed that someone 2SG.DAT 3F.SG.ACC have.CDL.3SG
 raccomandata per la promozione.
 recommended for the promotion
 Intended: 'Maria_i believed that someone recommended her_i to you for the pro-
 motion.'

P&Z suggest that the effect in (37), as well as its contrast with (38), can be captured under their account with the addition of a Point-of-View Principle (Pancheva and Zubizarreta 2018:1328), which requires that “within a logophoric domain marking point of view, if there are attitude holders among the event participants, one of them has to be the point-of-view center”. According to P&Z, a dative clitic like that in (37) is marked as a point-of-view center because it enters into an Agree relation with Appl. The CLR effect is then induced because the accusative clitic refers to an attitude holder while the dative clitic does not, yet the dative is the point-of-view center, thereby violating the Point-of-View Principle: the sole attitude holder in the domain is not a point-of-view center. In contrast, the idea is that examples like (38) have two attitude holders (see their discussion on pp. 1326-1327 on speech-act participants as attitude holders), and one of them, namely the dative argument, is indeed the point-of-view center.

If this is on the right track, we expect that LEI should *not* pattern with third-person dative arguments in inducing the CLR effect; rather, it should pattern with second-person dative arguments in not giving rise to the effect. Under the view that LEI is interpretively treated as a second-person argument, it should be eligible to be an attitude holder and therefore, for speakers who accept (38), it should be possible for LEI to appear as a dative alongside an accusative clitic attitude holder. We tentatively suggest that this expectation is borne out, on the basis of the data in (39), which were tested for a speaker who accepts (38). However, we believe that further work needs to be performed in order to

probe CLR patterns in Italian more generally, which seem to exhibit more variation than anticipated for examples like (37).

- (39) ✓Maria_i credeva che qualcuno Glie_i avrebbe
 Maria believed that someone 3DAT.LEI 3F.SG.ACC have.CDL.3SG
 raccomandata (al capo) per la promozione.
 recommended to.the boss for the promotion
 ‘Maria_i believed that someone recommended her_i to the boss for the promo-
 tion.’ (Jacopo Romoli, p.c.)

We thus see the behavior of LEI in an additional type of ditransitive person-sensitive environment in which it seems to pattern with second person, suggesting a syntacticosemantic account may be more widely applicable to person hierarchy effects with ditransitives.

6 Other Languages

On the assumption that PCC effects with ditransitives have the same grammatical provenance cross-linguistically, the general prediction of a syntacticosemantic account of the PCC is as in (40).

- (40) **PCC + Politeness Prediction:** If a language displays PCC effects in ditransitives for second-person arguments and has a third-person addressee-referring polite pronoun, this pronoun should also give rise to PCC effects.

This is a strong and falsifiable prediction, which can be tested across languages that both exhibit PCC effects with second person pronouns and have a third-person polite pronoun. However, the prediction warrants two important caveats. First, it is possible that a language has what might look like a third-person polite pronoun but is actually a non-pronominal (third-person) imposter. We observed for Italian in Section 4.3 that this distinction matters for the PCC, and expect this difference to carry over to other

languages, as well.

Second, while we take PCC effects with ditransitives to share a common grammatical source across languages, we do not necessarily expect all other person hierarchy effects to be attributable to the same source.¹⁹ It has in fact been reported that some person hierarchy effects outside of the PCC are ameliorated by morphological syncretism between verbal inflectional forms, a phenomenon which has been argued to be more consistent with an approach that attributes these person hierarchy effects to morphological conflicts that result in ineffability, as has been discussed for Icelandic dative-nominative constructions in particular (e.g. Schütze 2003; Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008; Coon and Keine 2021; Hartmann and Heycock 2022).²⁰ If the exponence-based view is on the right track for such effects, then we would like to suggest that, if a language has a person hierarchy effect that is ameliorated by syncretism, then no problem with exponence should arise with a third-person polite pronoun; this is in contrast to the expectation in (40).

In the rest of this section, we discuss two languages that have third-person polite forms and have been shown to exhibit person hierarchy effects: Spanish (6.1) and German (6.2). We show first that Spanish conforms to the prediction in (40) for ditransitive PCC environments. For German, we first demonstrate that the reported ditransitive PCC environment in German also yields results consistent with our prediction in (40). We then move on to a distinct person hierarchy effect in German, which arises outside of ditransitive environments. This is therefore an effect for which we expect polite pronouns to not necessarily pattern with participant pronouns, and this expectation is indeed borne out: the effect in question, which is reported to be ameliorated by syncretism

¹⁹Though some still might: for example, see Zubizarreta and Pancheva 2017 for the view that direct/inverse-type effects can be accounted for with the same type of P-Constraint applying to other verbal heads.

²⁰P&Z suggest (fn. 17) that their analysis can be extended to dative-nominative constructions if their point-of-view principles can also apply to heads outside of Appl, such as to a specific flavor of *v*. Here we simply note that the syncretism data are not readily compatible with this extension, as far as we can tell.

of verbal forms (Keine et al. 2019; Coon and Keine 2021), *does* treat the third-person polite pronoun as if it were third person.

6.1 *The PCC and Spanish* USTED

Beyond Italian, it is well-known that PCC effects obtain across other Romance languages, as well (e.g. Bonet 1991), though the interaction of person hierarchy effects and third-person polite forms is often not testable in other Romance languages because politeness forms are frequently accomplished via second-person plural marking rather than third person: this is true for French and Romanian (e.g. Wechsler and Hahm 2011). One notable exception is Spanish, which exhibits PCC effects (see Bonet 1991, 1994; Ormazabal and Romero 2007; among many others) and has the third-person polite form USTED.²¹

Like LEI, USTED behaves as a third-person argument despite referring to an addressee: in addition to finite verbal agreement with USTED (see e.g. Wang 2023:1306), third-person clitics are also employed for polite reference, including for the ACC clitic in *laísta* dialects (as shown in (41)-(42)).²² (USTED, like LEI, also binds third-person reflexives.)

- (41) a. Yo te respeto.
 1 SG.NOM 2 SG.ACC respect.1 SG
 ‘I respect you.’
 b. Yo la respeto.
 1 SG.NOM 3 SG.ACC respect.1 SG
 ‘I respect her.’
- (42) Yo la respeto (a usted).
 1 SG.NOM USTED.ACC respect.1 SG (DOM USTED)
 ‘I respect you.’

Rezac (2011:298) observes that a PCC effect obtains in Spanish with USTED; see also Jambrović (to appear). The phenomenon can be seen in (43): the accusative clitic *la* is

²¹Another exception is Portuguese, which has a form *você* that takes third-person verbal agreement (see e.g. Wang 2023:1307) and which is used for polite reference in some varieties.

²²One difference between LEI and USTED is that the forms of the former are all identical to that of a different pronominal series (the feminine singular third-person forms), whereas the latter includes the citation form *usted*, which for many varieties is a dedicated politeness form not seen elsewhere among Spanish personal pronominal forms.

grammatical in a 3>3 configuration if it refers to a third-person feminine singular referent, but it cannot be used as a polite USTED form in this expression. As is well-known (see Perlmutter 1970; Bonet 1991; Nevins 2007; among many others), the third-person dative clitic in (43) is realized as what is called “spurious” *se*, a form syncretic with the reflexive-like clitic *se*. (The expression remains ungrammatical if *se* is changed to the dative clitic *le*.)

- (43) *Se_i la presentaré (a los estudiantes_i).*
 SE(=3PL.DAT) {3F.SG.ACC /*USTED.ACC} present.FUT.1SG to the students
 ‘I will introduce her/*you (formal) to the students.’ (Rezac 2011:298)

Three Spanish speakers we have consulted (Francesc Torres-Tamarit, p.c., Cristina Real, p.c., and Andrés Saab, p.c.) also report a contrast for the sentences in (44). In the well-formed expression in (44-a), USTED appears in the spurious *se* form of the dative with an accusative third-person clitic (USTED>3), which is expectedly grammatical. (In the parenthetical continuation, the accusative third-person clitic is coreferent with the direct object of the preceding clause, and a null USTED subject triggers third-person agreement on the verb.) The infelicitous sentence in (44-b) is string-identical, though as reflected in the glossing, has an intended reading whereby USTED is the accusative clitic and the dative *se* is a third-person argument (hence 3>USTED). This reading is unavailable.

- (44) a. *Yo se lo encomendé (con la esperanza de que lo cuidara bien).*
 1SG.NOM {3SG.DAT/USTED.DAT} 3M.SG.ACC entrust.PST.1SG with the hope of that 3M.SG.ACC take.care.SBJV.IMPF.3SG well
 ‘I entrusted him to you (in the hope that you would take good care of him).’
 b. *#Yo se lo encomendé (con la esperanza de que lo cuidara bien).*
 1SG.NOM 3SG.DAT USTED.ACC entrust.PST.1SG with the hope of that USTED.ACC take.care.SBJV.IMPF.3SG well
 Intended: ‘I entrusted you (formal) to her/him (in the hope that she/he would take good care of you).’

Italian and Spanish thus exhibit the same pattern with respect to their polite pronominals, in that both give rise to PCC effects.²³

6.2 *Person hierarchy effects and German SIE*

We now turn to German, which shares with Italian both i) the use of third-person polite pronouns for addressees; and ii) the appearance of person hierarchy effects, including the PCC. We first consider PCC environments, which are reported to appear in a small corner of the language (Anagnostopoulou 2008). As we show, our predictions for PCC environments are consistent with the German data, albeit with some caveats. We then consider a second person hierarchy effect reported by Keine et al. 2019; Coon and Keine 2021, in which copular *assumed-identity* contexts exhibit person-based restrictions (see also Bhatia and Bhatt 2023 on Hindi-Urdu). This person hierarchy effect, seen outside of a ditransitive environment, is different from PCC effects in that there is an accompanying number-hierarchy effect, and even more strikingly, these effects have been reported to be ameliorated by syncretism (though see Hartmann and Heycock 2025). We assume that amelioration by syncretism supports an exponence-based analysis of person hierarchy effects, and our expectation is therefore that a third-person polite pronoun should not give rise to such effects. As we show, this expectation is borne out.

German has a set of polite pronominal forms that uses the third-person plural series across cases (nominative, accusative, dative, genitive and possessive: *Sie, Sie, Ihnen, Ihrer, Ihr*, respectively); we refer collectively to this set as SIE. As in Italian, polite subjects trigger agreement as if they were third person, and are ungrammatical with second-person agreement, as shown in (45). SIE also necessarily binds a third-person reflexive

²³We also note that the PCC effect with *USTED* may challenge Collins and Ordóñez's (2021) contention that *USTED* is an imposter, if Spanish behaves like Italian in permitting imposters to appear in PCC environments felicitously (as discussed for Italian in Section 4.3)—something we have not investigated. It is alternatively possible that Collins and Ordóñez's characterization of *USTED* is only applicable to the form *usted* but not to the clitic forms.

sich rather than employing the second-person forms *dich* (SG) or *euch* (PL). (Unlike Italian LEI, German SIE can be used for both singular and plural addressees.)

- (45) a. Sie {sind/*bist} nett.
 3PL.NOM be.3PL/be.2SG nice
 ‘They are nice.’
 b. Sie {sind/*bist} nett.
 SIE.NOM be.3PL/be.2SG nice
 ‘You (SG/PL formal) are nice.’

Because SIE refers to (an) addressee(s), the expectation under the current view is that any PCC effect in German that rules out combinations with a second person pronoun should also obtain with SIE. While the PCC had previously been thought not to be operative in German, Anagnostopoulou (2008) reports that it is, albeit in a small corner of the language. In particular, Anagnostopoulou reports that (weak) PCC effects only arise with pronominal clusters in the so-called Wackernagel position when the cluster appears before the subject. As shown in (46-a), it is possible to have a cluster of two weak pronouns precede a subject (in ACC > DAT order; on which see Müller 1999 and references therein). However, certain person combinations are reported to be ill-formed, including when the direct object is first or second person and the indirect object is third person; this is shown for a second-person object in (46-b). Anagnostopoulou observes that the effect is very restricted; for example, it vanishes when the subject appears before the pronominal cluster (Anagnostopoulou 2008:26).

- (46) a. dass es ihm der Fritz gegeben hat
 that 3SG.N.NOM 3SG.M.DAT the.NOM Fritz given has
 ‘that Fritz gave it to him’
 b. *weil dich ihm irgendwer vorgestellt hat
 because 2SG.ACC 3SG.M.DAT someone.NOM introduced has
 Intended: ‘because someone introduced you to him’ (Anagnostopoulou 2008:24-26)

We note, however, that in recent experimental work, Hartmann and Heycock (2025) find that native speakers judge sentences in which the pronominal cluster precedes the subject to be degraded, with no appreciable difference in the level of degradation be-

tween 3 IO>3 DO vs. 3 IO>1 DO contexts (though they did not test combinations of 3 IO>2 DO). In general, judgments for such sentences seem to us to be unstable.

With these caveats in mind, we can ask whether there is a contrast in acceptability when there is a third-person IO for i) a DO third-person plural *sie* (47) versus ii) a DO polite form *Sie* (48). We find that there is indeed a contrast, consistent with our predictions. (However, we acknowledge that further experimental investigation may be needed in order to clarify the pattern.)

- (47) Wer_i [Maria und Johanna]_j liebt, hat auch Angst, dass sie_j ihm_i
 who Maria and Johanna loves, has also fear, that 3PL.ACC 3SG.M.DAT
 jemand wegnehmen könnte.
 someone.NOM take.away could
 ‘Whoever_i loves [Maria and Johanna]_j is also afraid that someone could take
 them_j away from him_i.’

- (48) ??/*Wer_i Sie liebt, hat auch Angst, dass Sie ihm_i jemand
 who SIE.ACC loves, has also fear, that SIE.ACC 3SG.M.DAT someone.NOM
 wegnehmen könnte.
 take.away could
 Intended: ‘Whoever_i loves you (formal) is also afraid that someone could take
 you away from him_i.’

A different person hierarchy effect in German is observed outside of ditransitives by Keine et al. (2019) and is discussed further by Coon and Keine (2021), who find that both person and number hierarchies are implicated in copular *assumed-identity* expressions (on which, see also Heycock 2012). In particular, these authors present experimental evidence indicating that German speakers permit 1/2 > 3 sentences like (49-a), but do not allow 3 > 1/2 (49-b). They also find a number hierarchy effect, whereby PL > SG is possible (50-a), but the reverse is not (50-b). (It is crucial that the copular sentences have the interpretation that DP1 takes on the role of DP2 and not the other way around.)

- (49) a. Du bist Martin. ‘You are Martin.’
 2SG.NOM be.2SG Martin

- (50) b. *Martin ist du. Intended: 'Martin is you.'
 Martin be.2SG 2SG.NOM (C&K2021:685)
- a. Die Kinder sind der Baum.
 the.PL child.PL be.3PL the.SG tree
 'The children are the tree.'
- b. *Maria ist die Bäume.
 Maria be.3SG the.PL tree.PL
 Intended: 'Maria is the trees.' (C&K2021:685)

While there is a clear resemblance to PCC environments, this context is nevertheless different in four respects: i) there is no obvious sense in which applicative structure is involved; ii) there is an accompanying number hierarchy effect; iii) the case of the two nominals is nominative (rather than e.g. DAT-ACC) for both; and iv) it is reported that syncretisms between the agreeing forms have an ameliorating impact on the hierarchy effects.²⁴ On (iv), Keine et al. (2019) report that judgments improve when the form of the copula is compatible with agreement with either nominal, and this is the case for 1SG and 3SG forms of the copula in past tense forms (51) and in the subjunctive; this is expected under an account that ties the effect (in part) to an issue of exponence.

- (51) Er {*ist /?war} ich.
 3SG.NOM be.3SG /be.PST.3SG/ 1SG 1SG.NOM
 'He is/was me.' (Keine et al. 2019:4,29)

Because of the syncretism facts in particular, our expectation for this type of person hierarchy effect is that a third-person polite pronoun will behave like any third-person pronoun in not giving rise to the effect. This is indeed borne out.

First observe the person-based contrast when the subject (DP1) is a third-plural nominal (52): when the predicative nominal (DP2) is a third-person plural pronoun, the expression is grammatical, but if DP2 is a second-person plural pronoun, the expression is ungrammatical.²⁵

²⁴As far as we can tell, P&Z's account does not predict this person hierarchy effect, though it does not rule it out, either, if non-PCC person hierarchy effects may also arise in other parts of the grammar.

²⁵Some speakers we consulted report that *seid* 'be.2SG' is possible for them with the relevant inter-

- (52) Die Zwillinge sind {(?)sie /*ihr}.
 the.NOM.PL twins be.3PL 3PL.NOM 2PL.NOM
 ‘The twins are them/*you.’

In Coon and Keine’s (2021) analysis, the ungrammaticality in data like (52) arises because a probe on T agrees with both DPs, leading to a “gluttonous” configuration in which the person feature specifications between the two goals clash. As Coon and Keine clarify, this is itself not a problem; the issue is that the T probe cannot realize the clashing feature sets with a single vocabulary item, thereby yielding ineffability.

A prediction of any such exponence-based account is that no such complication should arise if DP2 is polite SIE rather than a second-person form. (For Coon and Keine’s analysis, the probe on T should find [PERS] and [PL] on both DPs, and should therefore be able to be realized with third-plural morphology.) This is borne out, as shown in (53).²⁶ (We note further that SIE in this expression can felicitously be interpreted either as a singular addressee or as more than one.)²⁷

pretation when DP2 is the second-person plural *ihr*, though this is ungrammatical for other speakers we consulted. Experimental results from Keine et al. 2019 similarly indicate that speakers find DP2 agreement ungrammatical in contexts where person and number hierarchies are not respected.

²⁶In recent work, Hartmann and Heycock (2025) find that no ameliorative effect of verbal syncretism (between first- and third-person singular agreement) obtains with the subjunctive in the related context of *mistaken-identity* sentences, potentially undermining Coon and Keine’s (2021) view that the morphological realization of the finite verb plays a role in such effects. Here we simply note that mistaken-identity contexts, at least for our consultants, pattern with assumed-identity contexts in showing a contrast parallel to that of (52)-(53).

- (i) Henny nimmt an, die Zwillinge wären {*ihr/✓Sie}
 Henny assumes the twins be.SBJV.3PL 2.PL.NOM/SIE.NOM
 ‘Henny thinks the twins are you.’

²⁷A reviewer points out that the polite pronoun also exhibits a number hierarchy effect in (i), further reinforcing the role of SIE’s formal properties rather than its interpretation in the feature hierarchy effects in assumed-identity constructions. We also find, as expected, that there is a contrast in acceptability between a second-person pronoun and a camouflage nominal (ii); a parallel contrast is observed by Keine et al. 2019:10 for first-person camouflage nominals.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (i) *Maria ist Sie.
Maria is SIE.NOM
Intended: ‘Maria is you (SG/PL).’ | (ii) Maria ist {*du /✓Eure Majestät}.
Maria is 2SG.NOM /your majesty
‘Maria is you/your majesty.’ |
|--|---|

- (53) Die Zwillinge sind Sie.
 the.NOM.PL twins be.INDC.3PL SIE.NOM
 ‘The twins are you (SG/PL).’ (also: ‘you are the twins’)

We have thus identified a person hierarchy effect in German that conforms to the predictions of a morphosyntactic analysis rather than a syntacticosemantic one. Given the differences between PCC environments and the German assumed-identity context with respect to their behavior with polite pronouns, we have suggested that PCC environments have a syntacticosemantic source whereas other person hierarchy effects may have a morphosyntactic source. This also converges with Drummond and O’Hagan’s (2020) recent conclusion that person hierarchy effects across constructions and languages might have heterogeneous sources (in their proposal, syntactic sources as opposed to morphological sources).²⁸

7 The Representation of Polite Pronouns

While we evaluated morphosyntactic proposals of the PCC in Section 5 assuming a particular dual-feature analysis of polite pronouns, alternative analyses of polite pronouns can also be found in the literature. In this section, we show how these alternatives fare for LEI and for PCC effects. We consider three accounts presently: Wang 2023, Wechsler

²⁸We know of at least one other language in which the prediction in (40) might be testable. According to Wang (2023:1297), several languages make use of third-person in (certain types of) politeness contexts, including the Pama-Nyungan language Warlpiri (see discussion in Wang 2023:1300, citing Laughren 2001), and this language also has been reported to exhibit PCC effects (Haspelmath 2004:7, citing Hale 1973:334; see theoretical discussion in Stegovec 2015).

The only other relevant prior claim that we are aware of comes from Preminger (2014:124-125), who suggests that in the language K’ichee’, a pronoun used for formal address behaves more like a third-person argument for the agreement purposes of the Agent Focus construction (citing a footnote from Stiebels 2006:526). However, no empirical support is provided for this, and moreover, this characterization is about the choice of agreement controller in the construction, rather than with person restrictions on the co-occurrence of arguments. Regardless, we assume that the Agent Focus construction should be subsumed under the same umbrella of person hierarchy effects as assumed-identity contexts, since there is likely no applicative structure involved.

and Hahm 2011, and Ackema and Neeleman 2018.

7.1 Wang 2023

Unlike our assumed dual-feature representation of polite pronouns, Wang’s (2023) proposal for polite pronouns is semanticopr pragmatic in character. Considering a large sample of languages, Wang shows that the feature values “recruited” for polite pronouns across many languages are plural number, third person, and indefiniteness, which have independently been shown to be semantically unmarked values with the weakest presuppositions (see relatedly Sauerland 2008). Wang argues that polite pronouns use these unmarked values in morphosyntax, motivated by a pragmatic maxim referred to as the *Taboo of Directness*, according to which politeness contexts require the weakest presupposition (for some feature(s)). This account links politeness to avoidance of specific reference, and correctly captures the values of person, number, and definiteness that are coopted in politeness contexts across languages.

The application of Wang’s account to LEI encounters (at least) two problems. First, it does not correctly predict that the marked feminine gender is employed in Italian for LEI rather than the unmarked masculine: it is not plausible that the Taboo of Directness could dictate the use of a feminine form instead of a masculine one (on gender markedness in Italian, see e.g. Percus 2011), so gender features would minimally have to be morphosyntactically specified not to be interpreted. Second, because reference to the addressee is not grammatically encoded directly, but rather, is implied by the pragmatic system under this view, a morphosyntactic or a syntacticosemantic analysis of the PCC would predict that no PCC effects should obtain with third-person polite pronouns, contrary to fact. Alternatively, a semanticopr pragmatic account of PCC effects under this view would incorrectly predict that imposters *should* give rise to PCC effects, contrary to fact (as discussed in Section 4.3).

7.2 *Wechsler and Hahm 2011*

The proposal for polite pronouns from Wechsler and Hahm (2011) (henceforth W&H) is framed within a dual-feature system known from the LFG literature (especially Wechsler and Zlatić 2003), with *CONCORD* and *INDEX* features, which are respectively “grammaticalizations of the form and the meaning of the [agreement] trigger” (p. 265), respectively. In their system, *CONCORD* features include lexically specific features such as declension and gender, whereas *INDEX* features are tied to properties of discourse reference, including person features. W&H’s analysis of polite pronouns focuses cross-linguistically on second-person plurals, which display a striking “mixed” pattern across many languages (e.g. in French), whereby verbal agreement is necessarily plural—agreeing with the formal number of the pronoun—whereas adjectival agreement is singular if the addressee is singular. W&H propose that this dichotomy arises as a result of i) a division between agreement targets that express *CONCORD* features or *INDEX* features, with the former agreeing in features such as gender, number, and case (e.g. adjectives) and the latter agreeing in features such as person, number, and gender (e.g. verbs); ii) specification of polite pronouns only for *INDEX* features in these languages, and iii) allowance for “semantic agreement” in cases of feature underspecification. Because verbal agreement requires *INDEX* features, it necessarily refers to the specified features of polite pronouns (e.g. plural for second-person plural polite forms).

It is not clear from W&H’s system how polite pronouns come to be interpreted as denoting addressees: *INDEX* features are typically associated with referential properties yet they are the grammatically specified features for polite pronouns—hence third-person plural pronouns will trigger third-person plural verb agreement (see Wurmbrand 2016:fn. 34 for a related criticism). More problematically for present purposes, third-person polite pronouns in the W&H system would bear third-person *INDEX* features,

in which case they should behave like third-person arguments for person agreement. Since person is an INDEX feature in their system, an agreement-based account of the PCC would predict under this system that no effects should obtain with polite pronouns, contrary to fact.

7.3 *Ackema and Neeleman 2018*

Ackema and Neeleman (2018:42-50) propose to derive formal identity between polite pronouns and other pronouns within a language via impoverishment at PF or LF. In their system, polite pronouns necessarily bear a feature HON (honorific) along with second-person features (for them, PROX and DIST) in the syntax, with these features being visible to syntactic processes. Subsequently, deletion triggered by the feature HON can occur either on the PF branch or the LF branch, giving rise to discrepancies between the realization of polite pronouns (and their agreement targets) at PF and the interpretation of these elements at LF. For example, Ackema and Neeleman suggest that second-person plural polite pronouns, such as those found in many languages (e.g. French), should be specified with a PL feature in the syntax, which is deleted in the context of HON at LF, resulting in number-neutrality at LF despite the plural form of the pronoun. Correspondingly, for third-person politeness pronouns such as the one found in German, the addressee-specific person features (for them, PROX) are deleted at PF in the context of HON, yielding the less marked realization of the pronoun as third person.

This style of analysis could in principle be applied to LEI, in which case, syntax-specific analyses of the PCC could correctly generate the badness of LEI in PCC environments, as LEI would be represented with second-person features in the narrow syntax. As in German, PF impoverishment would apply to delete second person features yielding third-person forms. To derive its feminine form and agreement, LEI would need to have a feature FEM in the syntax and undergo impoverishment at LF, such that it was

interpreted gender-neutrally.

As Ackema and Neeleman discuss, such an account, coupled with the assumption that Impoverishment only takes place post-syntactically,²⁹ predicts that the polite pronoun should behave for syntactic purposes as a second-person pronoun.³⁰ We would like to suggest that this is in fact not borne out for LEI. As noted above in Section 3, LEI as an object clitic triggers obligatory feminine agreement with a participle, in contrast to participant clitics including the second-singular *ti*, for which agreement is only optional. If we take the optionality of participial agreement with participant clitics to be attributable to the syntax (cf. Guasti and Rizzi 2002:191; Belletti 2017:499; Manzini 2023), then LEI appears to behave syntactically as third-person rather than second (cf. also fn. 8), contrary to expectation.

8 Concluding Remarks

We found that the Italian polite pronoun LEI does not conform to the predictions of a morphosyntactic account of PCC effects: despite its third-person verbal agreement behavior, LEI patterns with second person in giving rise to PCC effects. We suggested that these data are more compatible with a syntacticosemantic analysis of PCC effects such

²⁹This assumption, while quite widespread in the literature on Impoverishment, is not universally shared: see, for example, Keine (2010).

³⁰Ackema and Neeleman discuss this prediction for the German third-plural polite pronoun SIE, suggesting that two types of expressions distinguish second from third person, with the polite pronoun behaving in line with the former (citing observations from Simon 2003): i) adnominal pronoun constructions of the *you linguists* type—which are possible for second person but not for third (as in English, *you/they linguists*), and ii) relative clauses headed by pronominals, which take resumptive subjects in German with second person but not with third. We first note that for both, the dual-feature analysis is compatible, so long as the interpretable features can factor into the syntactic selection (which is poorly understood for both phenomena). Empirically, regarding (i), these type of adnominal constructions are not possible with singular pronouns in Italian for either second or third person, and therefore this cannot be tested; regarding (ii), there is no known analogue in Italian, and we note that the judgments with second person are in fact more variable than characterized by Ackema and Neeleman for German; see especially the experimental evidence from Trutkowski and Weiß (2016).

as that of Pancheva and Zubizarreta (2018). We emphasize here that this is not intended as an endorsement specifically of P&Z’s account; see especially Deal 2024 for criticism.³¹ Rather, we submit that a syntacticosemantically based theory of the PCC is on the right track, with P&Z’s point-of-view account being a recent representative example (see relatedly Charnavel and Mateu 2015 and Stegovec 2019, 2020). We also observed parallel behavior for the Fancy Constraint and for PCC effects in Spanish and German; in contrast, we observed divergent behavior for German copular environments, which we took to indicate that not all person hierarchy effects share a common provenance.

Before closing, we would like to point to a couple of outstanding issues. One comes from non-*de-se* environments. Charnavel and Mateu (2015) in fact suggest that their syntacticosemantic account of person hierarchy effects found with ditransitives is supported by amelioration of PCC effects in non-*de-se* environments in both French and Spanish; amelioration is also observed for Slovenian by Stegovec (2019, 2020). This is illustrated in the French example in (54), which has a 3>1 combination that nevertheless does not induce (as strong of) a PCC effect.

- (54) ?J_i’ ai rêvé que j’ étais Marilyn Monroe_m, que j’ étais chez Kennedy_k
 I have dreamed that I was Marilyn Monroe that I was house Kennedy
 et que je_m me_i lui_k présentais.
 and that I ACC.1SG DAT.3SG introduced
 “I_i dreamed that I was M. Monroe_m, that I was at Kennedy_k’s house and that I_m
 introduced me_i to him_k.” (Charnavel and Mateu 2015:693)

While we agree that the amelioration effect is in line with a syntacticosemantic ac-

³¹One empirical concern about P&Z’s account is that their P-Prominence condition is meant to be parameterizable, such that the interpretable feature on the Appl head may be [+PARTICIPANT] rather than [+PROXIMATE], which they make use of in the derivation of so-called *Super-Strong* PCC effects which ban combinations of 3>3 in some languages including Kambera (see Doliana 2013). However, if we understand the system correctly, this part of P&Z’s analysis seems to incorrectly predict that such languages do not tolerate third-person IOs altogether, which the data they cite from Kambera already indicate is not true (P&Z2018:1321, ex. 36b) (this data point involves a lack of DO cliticization but is grammatical with a third-person dative clitic). Similar issues are applicable for the derivation of *me*-first PCC effects, which they derive via P-Prominence requiring a [+AUTHOR] feature. In general, the P&Z system seems to make incorrect predictions for when there is an IO clitic but no agreeing/cliticizing DO.

count, we were unable to replicate the amelioration pattern in Italian, including with LEI—a topic that remains to be explored in future research.

Another issue concerns combinations of first-person datives with accusative LEI. Recall from Section 2 that some Italian speakers accept combinations of first- or second-person accusative clitics when the dative is also first or second person, as shown above in (6) and repeated in (55-a). This is in contrast with the combination of 1>3, which is acceptable for all speakers (55-b).

- (55) a. %Mi ti hanno affidato.
 1 SG 2 SG have.3 PL entrusted.M. SG
 %‘They have entrusted you to me.’ / %‘They have entrusted me to you.’
 (based on Bianchi 2006:2027)
- b. Me la hanno affidata.
 1 SG 3 SG.FACC have.3 PL entrusted.F. SG
 ‘They have entrusted her to me.’

Interestingly, even among some speakers who accept (55-a), substituting the second person accusative in (55-a) with an accusative LEI clitic makes the expression ungrammatical (56). There is no morphological reason for this combination to be ill-formed; the use of a third-person accusative clitic in this position is grammatical, as seen in the preceding example (55-b).³² Perhaps surprisingly, we have not found a correlation between the judgment for (55-a) and (56), an issue which we leave to future research.³³

- (56) (Dottor Biagi,) %me La hanno affidata.
 Doctor Biagi, 1 SG.DAT LEI.ACC have.3 PL entrusted.F. SG
 ‘Doctor Biagi, they have entrusted you to me.’

Speaking more broadly, further research is needed in order to identify where in the grammar person hierarchy effects can and do reside, with the issue not being fully set-

³²Manipulating the order or the allomorphic exponence of the clitics for (56) still results in ungrammaticality for all speakers (**La me*, **Le mi*, **Le me*, etc.).

³³The instability of judgments about (55-a) and (56) is perhaps reminiscent of Ormazabal and Romero’s (2007:332-334) observation that combinations of first and second pronouns in Spanish appear to have a special status for speakers who tolerate them, only being possible with particular verbs and patterning with non-argument clitics in various respects (see also related discussion in Rezac 2011:150-151).

tled in our view. The present article promotes the study of polite pronouns as a window onto such phenomena, with the hope that it leads to further inquiry that can continue to shed light on the PCC and other person hierarchy effects.

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