

# What's so special about dative?

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The placement of personal pronouns relative to a governing preposition in Old English (OE) is variable. Most appear to the immediate right of the preposition (where nominal objects of P always occur), but a significant proportion appear in a variety of 'special' positions to the preposition's left. Current theories of OE syntax allow for such variation in pronoun placement and treat special placement as a freely available option (e.g. van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1996). An analysis of placement according to pronoun case, however, suggests that the option of special placement is *not* freely available: while dative pronouns frequently precede the preposition, accusative and genitive pronouns do not.

There is no obvious reason for this apparent constraint against special placement of non-dative pronominal prepositional objects: there are no systematic lexical or semantic correlates with prepositional case in OE, and both dative and accusative pronouns are found in special positions when governed by a verb.

Conference papers typically offer *explanans* as well as *explicandum*. This is an exception. Instead, by outlining what I have gleaned so far about this rather strange phenomenon, I hope to prompt some thoughts about its underlying basis during question time.

## References

- Kemenade, A. van (1987). *Syntactic case and morphological case in the history of English*. Foris Publications, Dordrecht.
- Pintzuk, S. (1996). 'Cliticization in Old English'. In Halpern, A. L. & A. M. Zwicky (eds.) *Approaching second: second position clitics and related phenomena*. CSLI Publications, Stanford CA, pp. 375 – 409.