Order, case, and person: revisiting the bidirectional PCC in Slovenian

1 Introduction. The Person Case Constraint (PCC) is a co-occurrence restriction on phonologically weak arguments in ditransitive constructions, attested cross-linguistically [Perlmutter, 1971, Bonet, 1991, Anagnostopoulou, 2003, Nevins, 2007]. It arises when pronouns must acquire person features via Agree, and a higher-positioned pronoun blocks person valuation of a lower one. For Slovene, Stegovec [2020] proposes a unique bidirectional system in which both canonical and inverted PCC coexist, sensitive only to clitic order and independent of morphological case. Crucially, Stegovec distinguishes *strong* speakers, who reject all 1/2.CL>>2/1.CL and 3.CL>>1/2.CL combinations, from *weak* speakers, who allow 1/2.IO>>2/1.DO but still reject 3.IO>>1/2.DO configurations. Figure 1 summarizes the predicted system. This study provides the first large-scale empirical test of these predictions.

Strong canonical:	3.IO>>3.DO	1/2.IO>>3.DO	*1/2.IO>>2/1.DO	*3.IO>>1/2.DO
Strong reversed:	3.DO>>3.IO	1/2.DO>>3.IO	*1/2.DO>>2/1.IO	*3.DO>>1/2.IO
Strong combined:	3.CL>>3.CL	1/2.CL>>3.CL	*1/2.CL>>2/1.CL	*3.CL>>1/2.CL

Figure 1: Object clitic person restrictions in Slovenian [Stegovec, 2020].

2 Methods. 150 native Slovene speakers from 15 dialect regions completed an online acceptability judgment task, rating sentences on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = unacceptable, 5 = acceptable). All singular clitic combinations with dative and accusative pronouns were tested across 20 conditions, including predicted acceptable (e.g. 1/2.IO>>3.DO) and critical violation items (e.g. *3.IO>>1.DO, *1.DO>>2.IO), with fillers. Data were analyzed in R; speakers were classified as Strong, Weak, Non-PCC, or Mixed based on mean ratings across the two critical violation categories.

3 Results. Figure 2 plots national mean ratings ($\pm$ SE) by predicted category, with regional means in green. Acceptable conditions (1/2.CL>>3.CL, 3.CL>>3.CL) received the highest ratings (range: 3.54–4.66). Unacceptable 1/2.CL>>2/1.CL conditions were consistently rejected (range: 1.36–2.12). However, *3.CL>>1/2.CL showed gradient behavior (3ACC_1DAT: mean = 3.34), suggesting this violation is not categorically rejected. Strikingly, 1ACC_3DAT, a predicted acceptable condition, was rated unexpectedly low (mean = 2.49), revealing an ACC/DAT asymmetry independent of person.

Figure 3 shows individual speaker classifications. Most participants ($n = 92$, 65.7%) pattern as **Strong PCC speakers**, rejecting both violation types (*1/2.CL>>2/1.CL: mean = 1.55; *3.CL>>1/2.CL: mean = 1.92). Only 5 (3.6%) qualify as **Weak PCC speakers** based on Stegovec [2020], accepting *1/2.CL>>2/1.CL (mean = 3.45) but rejecting *3.CL>>1/2.CL (mean = 2.28). Two unpredicted groups emerged: **Non-PCC speakers** ($n = 19$, 13.6%), accepting both violation types; and a **Mixed group** ($n = 24$, 17.1%), rejecting *1/2.CL>>2/1.CL (mean = 2.21) but accepting *3.CL>>1/2.CL (mean = 3.57), the mirror image of the Weak PCC pattern.

4 Conclusion. The experimental results confirm the existence of PCC effects in Slovenian but argue against a strict binary strong/weak speaker distinction as proposed by Stegovec [2020]. The robustness of *1/2.CL>>2/1.CL rejections across all speaker groups (mean = 1.36–2.12) supports the claim that Agree-based person feature valuation is operative in Slovenian. However, the gradient acceptability of *3.CL>>1/2.CL configurations suggests that third-person clitics do not uniformly block Agree in the way [+participant] clitics do [Béjar and Rezac, 2003]. The unpredicted Mixed speaker group (17.1%), which rejects * 1/2.CL>>2/1.CL but accepts *3.CL>>1/2.CL, cannot be derived from a purely order-based constraint and suggests that the directionality of the Agree operation varies parametrically across speakers. We propose that a complete account of Slovenian PCC requires a feature-geometric representation that formally distinguishes [+participant] from [-participant] probes and allows for cross-dialectal parametric variation in clitic movement directionality.

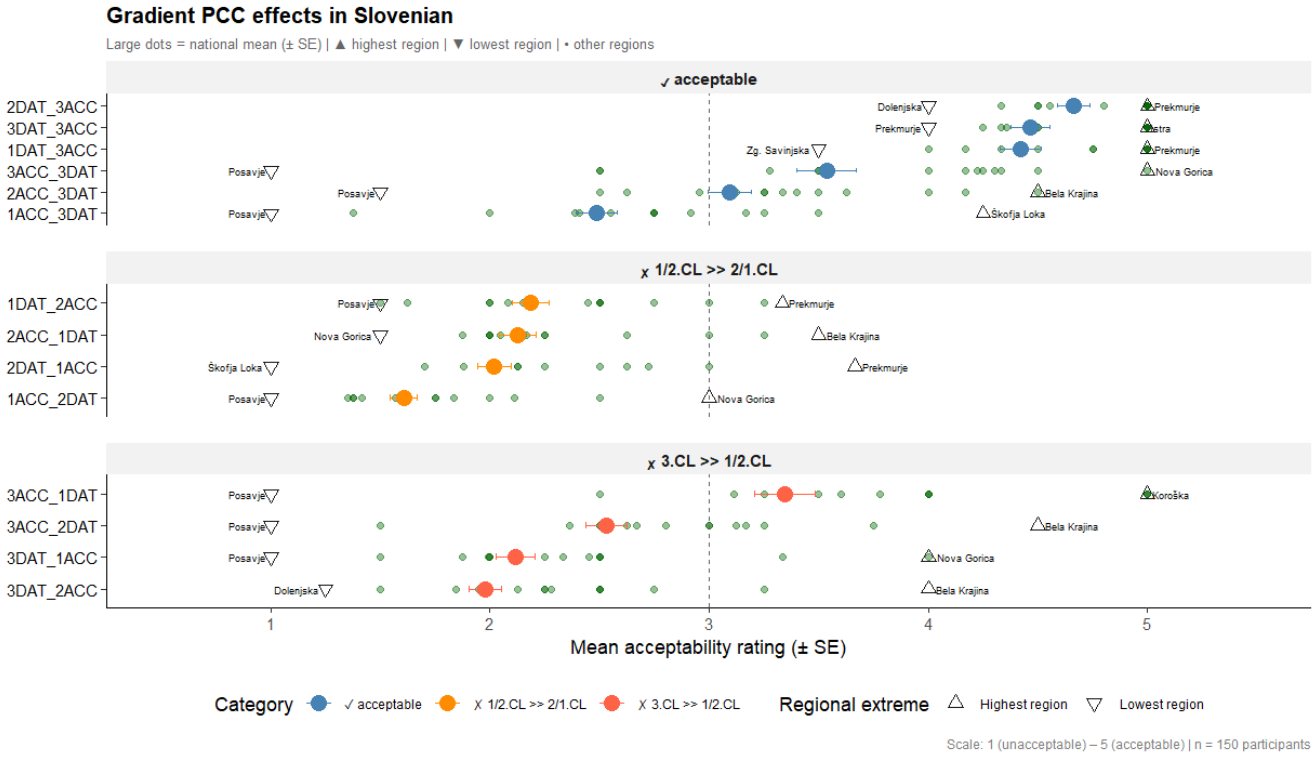

Figure 2: All (N=150) participants mean (± SE) vs. regional speaker variation (15 regions) by predicted PCC category.

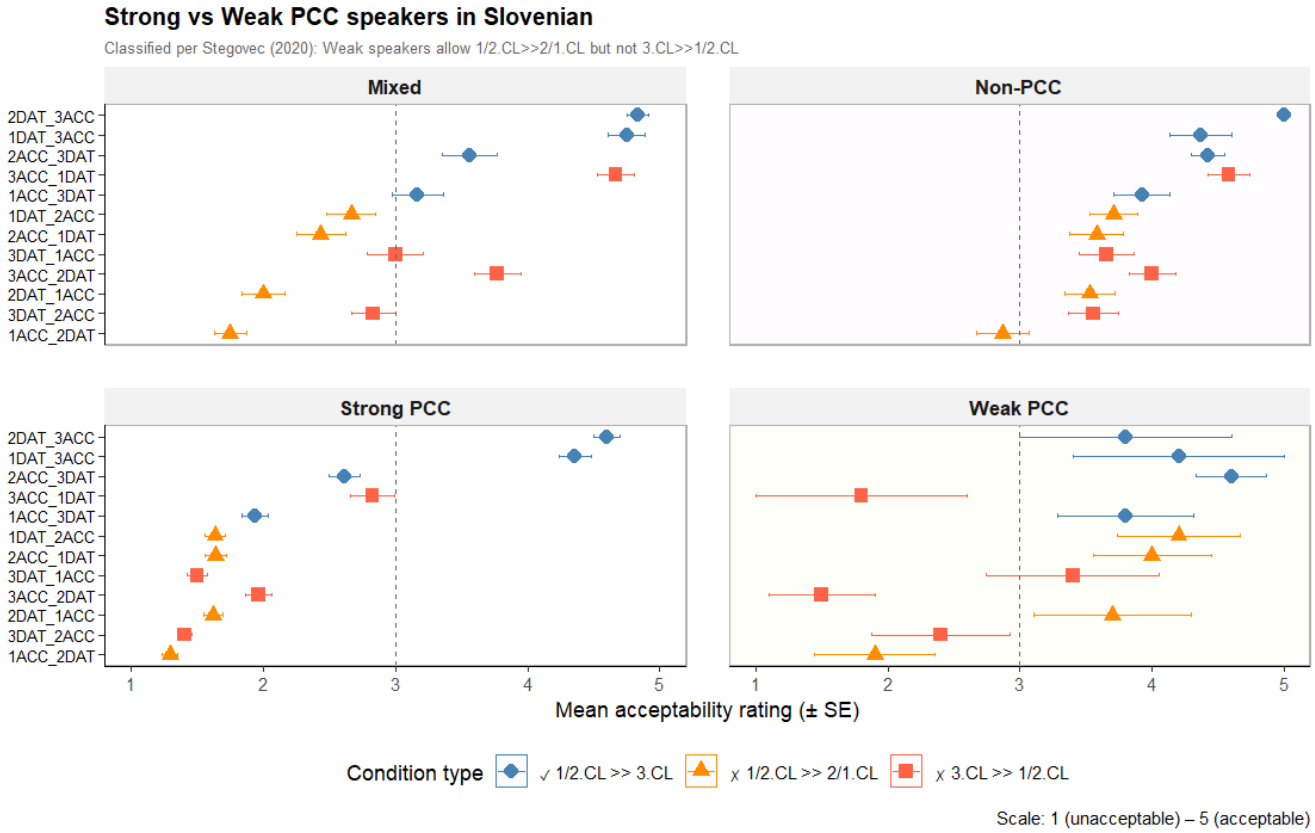

Figure 3: Acceptability ratings by speaker type.

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