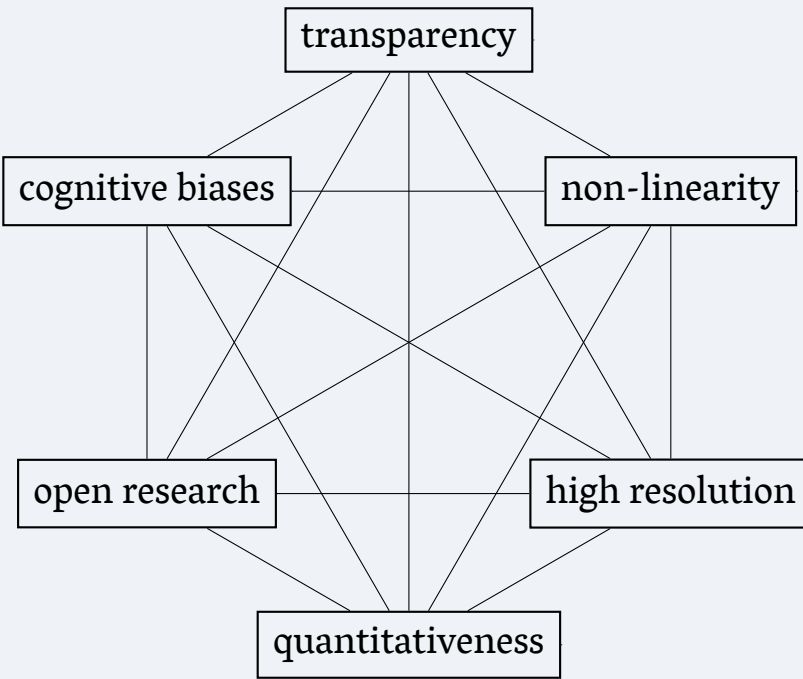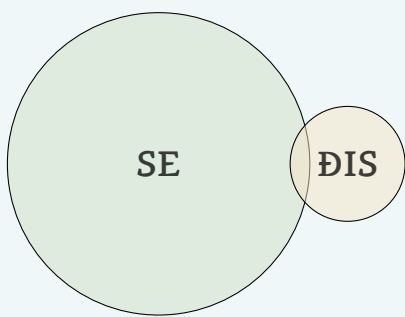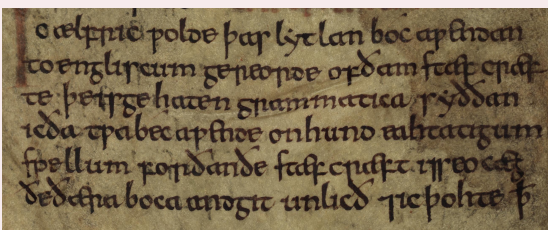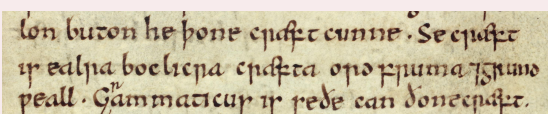# Demonstrative pronouns in Old English
Textual-structural classification, characterization and description
Júda Ronén · Hebrew University of Jerusalem · `https://ac.digitalwords.net`

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Old English has two demonstrative pronouns: SE (sē, sēo, þæt) and ÐIS (þes, þeos, þis). This study aims at describing their functional distribution in an independent status (i.e. not functioning as a determiner accompanied by a nominal phrase). From this description there emerges a clearer understanding of the said pronouns and the structural differences between them. It turns out that the environments in which they do stand in genuine opposition are quite limited.

This poster surveys the main functions of the pronouns. These generally fit in a 2×2 categorization according to the reference:
- whether the object of reference is nominal or grammatical;
- whether the pronoun points externally at some (con-)textual element or internally in a SE + þe 'this (one) who, he who' self-sufficient structure.

Corpus

Author: Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 955 – c. 1010)

Dialect: West-Saxon dialect

Text: *Lives of saints* (Cotton MS Julius E VII)
- ±40 texts, of two main genres:
  - Saints' Lives and Passions
  - Sermons
- ±400 pp. in print; 241 fol. in MS.

Data presentation

The MA thesis this poster is based on presents all of the examples from the corpus in an accessible, annotated and hyper-linked structurally categorized database. This has several interconnected advantages:

- transparency
- cognitive biases
- non-linearity
- open research
- high resolution
- quantitativeness

DIFFERENCES

SE

	nominal	grammatical
internal	+	+
external	+	+

internal × nominal
- pronominal antecedent

external × nominal
- introduction of new characters
- focality

internal × grammatical
- marking time

external × grammatical
- meta-linguistic reference
- translation and interpretation
- marking time
- grammatical anchor in apposition

ÐIS

	nominal	grammatical
internal	−	−
external	(+)	+

external × nominal
- concrete reference

external × grammatical
- meta-textual reference
- representation of content
- marking time
- topic under discussion

SE:ÐIS

	SE	ÐIS
quantitative	common (821)	less common (119)
syntagmatic	SE + þe	no ÐIS + þe
referential	nominal and grammatical	mostly grammatical
functional	diverse	quite limited
morphological	almost a full paradigm	partial paradigm

(the illustration isn't precisely proportional)

SE

Internal × Nominal

Pronominal antecedent — 192 exx.

Hi eodon þa secende · ⁊ symle clypigende ·
swa swa hit gewunelic is **þā ðe** on wuda gað oft ·

They went on seeking and always crying out,
as is often the wont of **those who** go through woods;
32:148

Internal × Nominal in apposition

Pronominal antecedent in apposition — 80 exx.

He wearð þa gehæled · ⁊ hæfde his gesihðe ·
⁊ ham eode blyðe butan latteowe ana
Se ðe lytle ær þanon wæs gelæd þurh ðone oþerne · [...]

Whereupon **he** was made whole, and had his sight,
and without a guide he blithely went home alone,
he (this one) who a little time before was led by another;
21:219

External × Nominal

Introduction of new characters — 102 exx.

BASILIVS WES GE-HATEN SVM HALIG BISCOP ·
se wæs fram cyld-hade · swiðe ge-healdsum ·
þeah þe he to langū fyrste · ún-ge-fullod wære ·

A certain holy bishop was named Basil;
he (this one) from childhood was very continent,
although for a long period he was unbaptized.
3:1

Focality — 79 exx.

se god þe me forgeaf þis gode geþanc ·
sé wyle þe ge-hyran me þingiende to him ·

the god who gave me this good thought,
he (this one) will hear thee, interceding to him for me.
3:539

Internal × Grammatical

Marking time — 40 exx.

[...] ⁊ heo gewāt to criste · **mid þam þe** hí cwædon amen.

[...] and she departed to Christ as (lit. **with that that**) they were saying 'Amen'.
9:146

External × Grammatical

Meta-linguistic reference — 84 exx.

[...] ác **se mán ana gæð úprihte · þæt** getacnað · þ hé sceall má þæncan úpp · þonne nyðer · þelǽs þe þ mód sy neoðer · þonne se lichoma [...]

[...] but **man alone goeth upright**; **that** signifieth that his thoughts should be more upward than downward, lest the mind be lower than the body [...]
1:57

Interpretation — 38 exx.

[...] ⁊ we sceolon winnan wið **þa wælhreowan fynd · þæt** synd **ða ungesewenlican · þa swicolan deofla** þe willað ofslean ure sawla mid leahtrum · [...]

[...] and we ought to strive against **the cruel enemies**, **that** is (lit. are), **the invisible ones, and the deceitful devils**, that wish to slay our souls with vices. [...]
25:690

Translation — 46 exx.

Ærest abel adames sunu wæs gode swa gecweme þurh unsceðþignysse ⁊ rihtwisnysse · þ crist sylf hine het **abél iustus · þæt is · se rihtwisa abél** ·

First Abel, Adam's son, was so pleasing to God, through innocence and righteousness, that Christ Himself called him **Abel Justus, that is, the Righteous Abel**.
16:13

Marking time — 41 exx.

Wunodon ða on sibbe sume hwile **æfter ðam** · ⁊ iudas þa sende mid sibbe to rome gecorene ærendracan [...]

They dwelt then in peace some time **after that**, and Judas then sent, with peace, to Rome chosen messengers; [...]
25:642

Grammatical anchor in apposition — 33 exx.

Witodlice **þæt** ís soþ wysdóm · **þæt** man gewylnige þ soðe lif [...]

Verily **this** is true wisdom, **that** a man desire the true life [...]
1:235

Mixed

Doxologies — 22 exx.

Þa arærde þa leoda · þær heo læg cyrcan ·
⁊ on hire naman gehalgodon · **þam hælende to wurðmynte seðe** æfre rixað on ecnysse god. AMEN.

Then the people reared a church on the spot where she lay,
and hallowed it in her name, **for honour for the Saviour**,
He who ever reigneth as God throughout eternity. Amen.
9:150

ÐIS

External × Nominal

Concrete reference (physical) — 8 exx.

Ic gelyfe on þe drihten swa swa **þas** gelyfað · [...]

I believe on Thee, Lord, even as **these** believe, [...]
11:214

Concrete reference (textual) — 13 exx.

Þa be-láf **sebastianus** on þære byrig mid **þam papan** ·
⁊ se geonga **tiburtius** · ⁊ þa twægen gebroðra [...]
Þas belifon on rome · on þære reðan eht-nysse · [...]

There remained in the city, with **the pope**, **Sebastian**,
and the young **Tiburtius**, and the two brothers [...]
these remained in Rome in the fierce persecution, [...]
5:339

External × Grammatical

Meta-textual reference — 15 exx.

Ðis wæs geworden ær ðæt gewinn come · ðurh hengest · ⁊ horsan þe hyndon ða bryttas · [...]

This was done before that strife came through Hengest and Horsa who defeated the Britons, [...]
19:147

Representation of content — 43 exx.

Þa astrehte se halga his handa ⁊ **cwæð** · [...]

Mid þam ðe he **þis cwæð** · þa com crist sylf him to · [...]

Then the Saint stretched out his hands and **said**, [...]
While he was **saying this**, there came Christ Himself to him, [...]
15:68

Marking time — 22 exx.

Æfter þysū wearð ge-leaht seo geleaffulla eugenia · ⁊ to þā hæðenan temple getogen mid ge-ðreate · þ heo þære gydenan diane · godes wurðmynt gebude ·

After this the faithful Eugenia was caught, and dragged, with threatening, to the heathen temple, that she might offer the worship, due to God, to the goddess Diana.
2:378

Topic under discussion — 6 exx.

Be **þysum** cwæð se ælmihtiga god · to moyse on þā wæstene · [...]

Concerning **this** spake the Almighty God to Moses in the wilderness, [...]
13:156

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

By examining the distribution of the numerous occurrences of SE and ÐIS two main conclusions can be drawn:

- They can be classified into a relatively few core functions according to their syntagmatic-combinational and paradigmatic-commutative features. Some of these functions are unexpected.
- SE:ÐIS opposition is very limited, both functionally and with respect to the number of occurrences. In many cases, SE and ÐIS are in complementary distribution.

Ælfricus Grammaticus

I, Ælfric, wished to translate this little grammar book called Grammatica into English — after I've translated the two books of eighty homilies — because grammar is the key that unlocks the understanding of these books [...]

[...] this craft (grammar) is the source and foundation of all literary crafts [...]

— *Ælfric's Grammar*, Oxford, St. John Collage, MS. 154, ff. 1v and 143r

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(this poster and the MA thesis it is based on are available on-line)