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SOME NOTES ON ENGLISH AND SLOVAK PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Miroslav Bázlik

PART I

In both English and Slovak, personal pronouns function as noun-phrase pronouns; they are not used as determiner pronouns.

The pronouns of the first and second person are used only deictically, never referentially, i.e., they are not used in coreference with other noun phrases.

In both languages (in contrast to some other languages, e.g. Spanish), pronouns are the only noun phrases that can be used as the subject with the first and the second person of the verb though in English this is less overt due to little variation in the form of the verb. If a non-pronominal noun phrase is to be used in the subject, it must be attached to a pronoun as an apposition. In English, this is only possible if the appropriate personal pronoun is used in the subject noun phrase, for example:

We, citizens of this country, will decide on our future.

My, občania tejto krajiny, rozhodneme o svojej budúcnosti.

In Slovak, other pronouns (though not non-pronominal noun phrases) may also be used with the first and the second person of the verb, for example:

Všetci přídeme včas.

We shall all come on time.

Obaja mi pomôžete.

Both of you will help me.

With the exception of imperative sentences, English sentences constructed without a personal pronoun in the subject are always interpreted as referring to the third person.

Personal pronouns distinguish number, case, person and (in the third person) gender, but opposition of definiteness is not systematically followed. Apart from some uses of WE, YOU, and THEY in those causes when they refer to people in general, personal pronouns are understood as definite.

Not all languages have the same system of personal pronouns. In Hungarian, for example, gender is not distinguished, and there are special pronouns corresponding to the Slovak VY when used to show respect (distinguishing number as well); special pronouns of respect exist in Spanish and in other languages. Before the Modern English period, English lost the distinction of the singular and plural in the second person pronoun. Nor is there any choice corresponding to the Slovak TY and VY distinction to show respect.

Both in English and Slovak, gender is distinguished in the third person singular. In Slovak, in addition, there is also a gender distinction in the plural. The form ONI refers to persons of male sex, ONY to the rest, but the spoken Slovak exhibits the tendency to neutralize this opposition in favour of ONI, perhaps owing to their phonetic similarity and to the fact that no distinction is made in cases other than the nominative.

Though it is not only the case with personal pronouns, the Slovak masculine gender is used in the sense of the dual gender (also called common gender, cf. Dušková 1965). The pronoun HE, as Dušková shows, is often avoided in this function. In recent years, a new pronoun, though only used in written English (there is hardly any pronunciation associated with it), has occasionally been used, i.e. the pronoun S/HE. Number in personal pronouns is not totally parallel to number in nouns. In personal pronouns the singular and plural forms are morphologically unrelated to each other and, moreover, the meaning of the plural form is not necessarily "more than one singular item". For example, with the first person plural pronoun WE/MY, the plural means "more than one I/JA" only exceptionally, e.g. when a mass of people calls out slogans, such as

We want peace!

My chceme mier!

The English second person pronoun YOU has the same form for both numbers. Such use is found in Slovak when showing respect for the hearer: VY is used to talk to both one and more persons.

In contrast to Slovak, where personal pronouns have the same case system as nouns, English personal pronouns have case distinctions not found in nouns or in other pronouns (except WHO/WHOM). There is an interesting tendency in Modern English to use the objective case forms also in some instances which once were the domain of the subjective form, viz. in the subject complement, in coordinated subjects, when forming sentences on their own, and after THAN. This tendency is particularly strong with the first person singular pronoun. Thus *It is I* sounds

too formal, and *It is me* is usually preferable, especially in informal English, where the objective form can be used with other personal pronouns as well.

There seems to be a reorganization going on in the system of English personal pronouns: the basic (subjective) forms are getting close to prefixes corresponding to the endings of the Slovak verbs; their (objective) counterparts are increasingly used in all other situations, even in the subject. This is why Strang (1968.115) prefers the terms *subject case* and *unmarked case*. A similar process took place in French personal pronouns: the forms used in the subject immediately preceding the verb (only some unstressed words can be used in between) are JE, TU, IL, ELLE, their independent counterparts are MOI, TOI, LUI; if the subject is stressed, both forms are used next to each other, for example.

Moi, je ne sais pas.

Looking at the case system of Slovak personal pronouns, some interesting features can be found:

- (a) There are stressed and unstressed forms in the genitive, dative, and accusative, of JA, TY, ON, i.e. MŇA — MA, TEBE — TI, JEHO — HO.
- (b) There are special forms used without and with prepositions, e.g. JU — PRE ŇU, JEHO/HO — ZA NEHO, etc.
- (c) Some forms of ON and ONO can coalesce with the preposition, e.g. O NEHO > OŇHO, OŇ, PRE NEHO > PREŇHO, PREŇ, etc.

In addition to case forms, the Slovak personal pronouns thus contain some more specialized forms. In English spelling (except in some representations of direct speech and in personal letters), we shall hardly find such distinctions. Nevertheless, they do exist, even if the choice of the forms is not governed by exactly the same principles as in Slovak. In pronunciation, there are often different forms according to whether the pronoun is stressed or, as is more frequent, unstressed, whether the speaker uses the "lento" or, which seems to be more frequent, "alegro" speech tempo. Thus ME is pronounced [mi:], or, more frequently [mi], YOU as [ju:], but more frequently as [ju], or [jə].

The number of the forms of English personal (and not only personal) pronouns is thus higher than is usually thought. Attention has to be paid to the fact that the stressed forms are improper in situations in which there is no "good reason" for their use. A similar improper effect would be produced in Slovak if the stressed form such as JEHO were used instead of the unstressed HO.

Though English personal pronouns may be stressed if it is necessary, emphasis is often achieved by adding another, emphatic, pronoun (a SELF-pronoun) in apposition to the personal pronoun. In Slovak such emphasis is possible with SÁM but the retention of the personal pronoun in the subject as opposed to its deletion (which is the unmarked use) is itself

understood as emphatic. English non-emphatic personal pronouns are usually translated by zero pronouns (plus the verbal ending) in the Slovak subject.

You must hurry up.
They have not arrived yet.

Musíš sa ponáhľat.
Ešte neprišli.

The only case of omission of the English personal pronoun in the function of the subject (if we do not take into account ellipsis in coordinated clauses, some idiomatic constructions such as *Haven't seen you for ages*, or the omission of IT after AS in some passive clauses) is that of YOU in imperative sentences, in which the pronoun is used only if particular emphasis is intended. This is one of the few cases of direct correspondence between English and Slovak.

In Slovak, personal pronouns can be used emotively in a variety of functions. These are described in Oravec 1955. For example, the dative of the personal pronoun of the second person (TI, VÁM) — only in the unstressed form — is often used in conversation to make the communication more expressive, to keep the attention of the listener.

Idem ti cez les a tu sa ti spoza stromu vyrúti na mňa vlk.

In English it is impossible to express the same by analogical linguistic means. In order to keep the attention of the listener, other possibilities stand at our disposal, for example the imperative form of the verb IMAGINE, progressive present, dramatic present (also used in Slovak), or the phrase YOU KNOW (very frequent in conversational English) added as a kind of insertion, or a tag question.

Imagine how I'm going through the wood when ...

The English personal pronouns WE, YOU, and THEY are also used as pronouns referring to people in general, thus losing their definite meaning. In this use, WE and YOU are similar to ONE (which is not a personal pronoun) and correspond to the Slovak ČLOVEK or to the reflexive passive. THEY is used mainly in the construction THEY SAY and corresponds to the Slovak reflexive passive (HOVORÍ SA). The form HOVORIA, ŽE ... is not common in this meaning. In German there is a special pronoun MAN (e.g. MAN SAGT) but there is no one-to-one correspondence between this pronoun and any form in English or in Slovak. (An interesting study of this problem is Dušková 1973).

We never know.
You never know.
One never knows.
Nikdy sa nedá vedieť.
Človek nikdy nevie.

In case YOU is used in this way in a question, the answer will again contain YOU and not I or WE.

A: Do you open it this way?

Otvára sa to takto?

B: Yes, you do.

Áno.

In both English and Slovak the neuter form of the third person singular pronoun exhibits some interesting features. In correspondence to the English IT, the Slovak pronoun is often TO and not ONO. This is because the English IT also functions as a demonstrative pronoun (apart from various other uses).

It is my sister.

To je moja sestra.

I don't like it.

Nepáči sa mi to.

Here, reference is not made to something (a noun phrase) mentioned before but to something pointed to and not named yet, or to a whole idea expressed before. Even other pro-forms can be used, e.g. the adverb TAM, if the syntactic role is changed.

I didn't like the place. It smelled of sawdust.

Nepáčilo sa mi to mesto. Smrdeli tam piliny.

An interesting combination in Slovak is that of ONO and TO in the same structure:

Veď mu ono to vyjde z hlavy.

If the English IT (as well as any other personal pronoun) is anaphoric, the Slovak pronoun is simply not used in the role of the subject.

I don't like it.

Nepáči sa mi.

In their referential (i.e. anaphoric and cataphoric) and deictic use, personal and demonstrative pronouns are close to each other. That also makes it possible to replace one type by the other. As Squib 1990 has shown, such shifts from one pronoun type to the other may involve expressiveness. The demonstrative pronoun used instead of the personal pronoun indicates rudeness in

Where did you meet that?

when used on being introduced to someone's new partner. Squib observes that the given connotations are lost if the pronoun is used in the plural.

PART II

CORPUS DATA

Most of the English personal pronouns correspond to personal pronouns in the Slovak translation. Our main purpose in this part is to look at those instances in which a personal pronoun in one language does not correspond to a personal pronoun in the other language. Two main cases will be considered: (a) the English personal pronoun is not translated as a personal pronoun into Slovak, (b) the Slovak personal pronoun in the translation from English does not correspond to a personal pronoun in the original.

The main representative of equivalence (a) is the use of a zero element in Slovak in the subject function (irrespective of the function of the English personal pronoun to which it corresponds).

We examined a total of 565 occurrences of English personal pronouns and their Slovak counterparts. 287 of these correspond to Slovak counterparts in the subject function, of which 238 correspond to the zero subject (the subject is represented in the ending of the Slovak verb). In most instances the reason lies in the fact that whereas in English the subject must be explicitly expressed, in Slovak the explicit subject need not be present. In some fewer instances, some other structural differences between the examined languages play a part, such as the absence of the formal subject in Slovak, e.g.,

It was almost morning.

Už svitalo.

including the construction with the anticipatory IT,

To me it's a sin to kill a man. (Hemingway)

Pre mňa je hriech zabiť človeka.

or ellipsis of a larger part of the structure including the subject, or the use of the verbless predicator (e.g. TREBA). The examined corpus contains altogether 12 occurrences of the zero subject for which these other structural differences are responsible.

Zero subject is also common in the Slovak clauses corresponding to the English "accusative + infinitive" construction.

I didn't expect you to remember. (Hailey)

Nečakala som, že si zapamätáte moje meno.

However, not every "accusative" in the English "accusative + infinitive" construction corresponds to the Slovak subject:

Observation of 47 has enabled us to locate 17 at the Green Hotel, Richmond. (Galsworthy)

Pozorovanie 47 nám umožnilo zistiť, že 17 je v Green hoteli v Richmonde.

Yet in 49 occurrences the English personal pronoun has been translated explicitly into Slovak as the subject personal pronoun.

A regular type can be seen in the Slovak structure "subject + verb + subject complement in the nominative" (9 occurrences). A possible explanation can lie in the fact that the Slovak nominative, when used alone in a structure, tends to be interpreted as the subject unless there is another subject. If the subject is zero, the structure with the nominative looks like "subject + copular verb", which is not a complete structure, and to reinterpret as "copular verb + subject complement" may require a special effort on the part of the hearer. In most instances the demonstrative TO is used and not the personal pronoun.

It was a strange situation. (Cronin)
Bola to nezvyčajná situácia.

The subject is less easily omissible when the subject complement is expressed by an adjective phrase.

Wouldn't it be fun? (Galsworthy)
Nebolo by to zábavné?

TO can be used also in correspondence to pronouns other than IT.

He was an old man. (Hemingway)
Bol to už starec.
They are a morbid lot. (Galsworthy)
Sú to mrcha zeliny.

The personal pronoun is used in the Slovak subject when it expresses contrast, especially to another subject (7 occurrences).

She set down the flat iron platter in front of him and he noticed her handsome brown hands. (Hemingway)
Plochá liatinový pekáč položila pred neho a on si všimol na nej pekné hnedé ruky.
If I were you I wouldn't fight it. (Hailey)
A ja na vašom mieste by som to nevyvracala.

The Slovak personal pronoun is used in the subject when coordinated with another noun phrase (1 occurrence).

Val Dartie and I fell in love. (Galsworthy)
Val Dartie a ja sme sa do seba zaľúbili.

The demonstrative TO is used in anaphoric coreference to structures larger than a noun phrase (e.g. clauses, sentences, groups of sentences). Thus in

I like it.
Páči sa mi to.

the possible unit to which IT/TO is anaphoric is less probably a noun phrase; with a noun phrase it would be sufficient to say *Páči sa mi*.

The personal pronoun is used in the Slovak subject if the subject is highlighted, either explicitly by a syntactic construction (apposition, intensifier — 3 occurrences) or by intonation and stress (such use may correspond to an English construction with syntactic highlighting though it may be prosodic highlighting in English as well). (12 occurrences.)

She, more than any of the others, stood up with an ignorant, yet somehow respectable air of conviction. (Dreiser)

Z celej rodiny ona najväčšmi upútala svojím presvedčením.

Emphasis can be achieved by using a demonstrative pronoun instead of the personal pronoun.

He will go for people when he's with the baby. (Galsworthy)

Ten sa púšťa do ľudí, keď je pri dieťati.

The Slovak nominative personal pronoun is also used when the verb phrase is ellipted in comparative constructions with AKO (NEŽ). Here it often corresponds to the objective case form of the English personal pronoun.

He was four years older than me. (Reed)

Bol o štyri roky starší ako ja.

In functions other than the subject the Slovak equivalents of English personal pronouns are mainly personal pronouns, too; ellipsis is less common than in the subject function because there is no formal indication of what has been ellipted.

Who wants him? (Cronin)

Kto volá?

You'll see it yourself. (Cronin)

Uvidíte.

The English personal pronoun may correspond to a full noun phrase in Slovak:

I went across to her. (Mattsson)

Pomaly som kráčal k vysokej blondínke.

If the English personal pronoun is the alternative to a reflexive pronoun, the Slovak equivalent is a reflexive pronoun.

Fleur... was staring straight before her. (Galsworthy)

Fleur... hľadela uprene pred seba.

Equivalence (b), i.e. the Slovak personal pronoun corresponding to elements other than the personal pronouns in English, was found in 90 instances out of the total of 353 occurrences of personal pronouns in Slovak translations from English. Of these 40 were due to relatively free translation. In 29 occurrences the Slovak personal pronoun corresponds to zero in the English original. This is mainly if the context enables ellipsis in English, or when the Slovak personal pronoun has a function for which personal pronouns are not used in English (especially expressiveness). Examples:

Pomohlo mi chemické vzdelanie, ale nie veľa. (Hailey)
 The chemistry background helped, though not much.
 Bolo nám ti tak krásne! (Hailey)
 It's been so wonderful here!

In a few cases (3 occurrences) a full noun phrase is used in English:

Starec ukázal naňho hlavou a usmial sa. (Hemingway)
 The old man nodded his head at this man and smiled.

(Note here that in its anaphoric function the Slovak personal pronoun corresponds to the English demonstrative.) In another 3 instances the Slovak personal pronoun corresponds to an English pro-form with a referential (anaphoric) function:

I ja sa ho chcem zúčastniť. (Hailey)
 I'm expecting to be there.

(Here HO corresponds to the English adverb THERE.)

The most predictable, though not too frequent (15 occurrences) seems to be the equivalence of the Slovak personal pronoun in the dative case (possessive dative) and the English possessive pronoun, especially if the process expressed in the verb is in the interest or benefit (or the opposite) of the person expressed by the pronoun.

Nemyslíte, že je to milé, ako mi tento pes stráži dieťa? (Hemingway)
 Don't you think it's rather touching the way this dog watches my baby?

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NIEKOĽKO POZNÁMOK O ANGLICKÝCH A SLOVENSKÝCH OSOBNÝCH ZÁMENÁCH

Osobné zámená v angličtine a v slovenčine si často navzájom korešpondujú, avšak, vzhľadom na niektoré rozdiely v ich syntaktických vlastnostiach, sú aj prípady, v ktorých osobné zámeno v jednom jazyku korešponduje s inou gramatickou štruktúrou v druhom jazyku. Prvá časť príspevku sa zaoberá vybranými morfológickými, syntaktickými, fonetickými a sémantickými odlišnosťami v systéme anglických a slovenských zámen. Druhá časť je venovaná popisu najcharakteristickejších rozdielov v korpuse 565 vetných dvojíc (anglický originál a jeho slovenský preklad) a sústreďuje sa na tie prípady, keď osobnému zámenu v jednom jazyku zodpovedá nulové zámeno v druhom jazyku.