

THE (RE)PRESENTATION OF THE AUTHOR IN CZECH AND SLOVAK SCIENTIFIC TEXTS

This paper poses the question of how academic writers present themselves to the audience and focuses on the functions of forms of self-reference in Czech and Slovak scientific discourse. For scientific texts, the Latin rhetoric tradition recommended the so called *pluralis modestiae* or *pluralis auctoris* as an appropriate linguistic means of self-presentation of the writer, conveying his modest and non-imposing approach to the reader. Whereas in the English academic setting this habit has been abandoned in favor of the more responsible “I” presentation, writers of Slavic linguistic and cultural background still adhere to the “we” textual self. The paper focuses on the function of the we-perspective in Czech and Slovak scientific texts and distinguishes between their ideational, interactional and textual functions.

1. Introduction

Most instances of naturally occurring communication are egocentric and subjectivity is an inherent property of any discourse, including academic texts, despite the “apparent lack of human intervention” in reporting scientific information, where “facts should speak for themselves”. Academic discourse, viewed as an instance of social interaction between authors and their audiences, poses the question of how academic writers present themselves to the audience (the listener or the reader) in order to create a particular impression of themselves and to define, as well as to control the communicative situation according to their goals. They have at their disposal, in addition to a number of other devices such as modals and various (meta)textual means of expressing attitudes, forms of self-reference, forms of address, and their combinations. These forms are often highly grammaticalized in individual languages and conventionalized in the respective cultures, particularly in oral communication. Their active constructive role in written texts has been explored mainly in literary narratives, especially in those written in the 1st

person singular and based on the interplay between the writer and the narrator of the story, and, occasionally, also on addressing and positioning a fictitious reader¹.

This paper focuses on the functions of forms of self-reference in scientific discourse. For scientific texts, the Latin rhetoric tradition recommended the so called *pluralis modestiae* or *pluralis auctoris* as an appropriate linguistic means of self-presentation of the writer, conveying his modest and non-imposing approach to the reader. The authorial presence in a scientific text ranges nowadays from his/her full invisibility to his/her marked prominence.

Even if we admit that individual writers have different habits and even if we do not lose sight of genre variation, we can perceive differences between individual languages and cultures that should be interpreted, or, at least, taken into account. Whereas writers of Slavic linguistic and cultural background still adhere to the “we” textual self, in the English academic setting this habit has been abandoned in favor of the more responsible “I” presentation (as shown in Duszak 1997, Cecchetto – Stroinska 1997, Vassileva 2000, Yakhontova 2002 and others). This paper provides Czech and Slovak data illustrating the analyzed feature. Its aim is to discuss possible rhetoric motivations and cognitive consequences of different presentations of scientific information and the cultural context of the preferred choices.

2. The ethic context of the authorial self-presentation in scientific text

Any investigation of scientific discourse has to take into account the tension between the two contradictory assumptions about scientific discourse: 1. it is universal, and devoid of human characteristics, since facts speak for themselves, 2. it is culture-specific, and speaker-marked, since it is the speaker who constructs the communicated facts. Both assumptions go back to the Greek rhetorical tradition: Aristotle’s rhetoric was conceived as the art of “giving effectiveness to truth”, in contrast to Sophistic rhetoric, which developed as an art of “giving effectiveness to the speaker” (Baldwin 1928: 3). In order to reconcile the two contradictory assumptions, and to meet Aristotle’s claim to *ethos*, genre variation within an academic discourse is to be acknowledged (including the distinction between hard sciences and humanities), and the organizing role of the writing scholar is to be given “an appropriate interpretation”, as in Latour and Woolgar (1979) and in Hunston’s (1994) formulation: “The result of the construction of a fact is that it appears unconstructed by anyone; the result of rhetorical persuasion in the agnostic field is that participants are convinced that they have not been convinced (Latour and Woolgar 1979: 240). In other words, to be convincing, what is persuasion must appear to be only reportage” (Hunston 1994, 193).

The chief linguistic means of an objective report are verbs that locate agency in the 3rd person (*data show*) as well as various impersonal, passive and reflexive constructions, modals, generic forms (*one, man*), etc. which indicate the human subject only indirectly. Some scholars manage to eliminate everything that may be considered subjective, above all any reference to themselves, reference to their epistemic and deontic doings, i.e. “the locus at which the subject of enunciation organizes its own performance, foresees obstacles, and passes tests” (Greimas 1990, 30). These authors shift themselves to the background, seemingly “giving effectiveness to truth” (their indirect presence in a text is discussed in Cecchetto – Stroinska 1997). It also happens in Czech and Slovak articles and even more

¹ In comparison with fiction, employing the principles of foregrounding, deautomatization and playfulness, focalization and point of view, academic writing is much less variegated and much more conventionalized. Nevertheless, the idea of transparency of the language of science has been recently challenged in many ways, starting with the breaking of *Ich-tabu* norms.

frequently in Russian texts that the writer refers to himself/herself using the 3rd person sg. (*autorka se domnívá...*, *автор хотел бы настаивать на том...*) Other scholars refer to themselves either as to members of a scientific community (employing the *we* perspective in presenting facts), or refer directly to themselves (employing the *I* perspective)².

3. Rhetorical conventions and their functions: the authorial plural and singular

The authorial self-presentation recommended as early as the Latin rhetorical tradition, the *pluralis modestiae* or *pluralis auctoris*, has thus far been considered fundamental in the Czech and Slovak setting, considering the fact that it is appropriately modest and unobtrusive. It prevails in Czech and Slovak scientific texts, including linguistics texts. However, if we compare older linguistics texts with newer ones (even in a period as brief as the past decade), it is evident that the plural perspective of some authors is declining in favor of the perspective of the authorial subject expressed using the singular, i.e. the authorial *I*. Undoubtedly, this is taking place given the influence of the Anglo-Saxon norms for scientific communication, in which the singular perspective prevails over the plural one. Studies in contrastive rhetoric (cf. Duszak 1997, Cecchetto – Stroinska 1997, Vassileva 2000, Yakhontova 2002; Čmejrková 2006 deals with the comparison of authorial conventions in Czech and English texts, Čmejrková forthcoming deals with the comparison of Czech and Russian linguistics texts) have devoted a relatively great amount of attention to this phenomenon and the intercultural differences in understanding what is considered appropriate in a given community. The analysis of this formal feature, which is seemingly superficial and at first glance insignificant, enables us to look into the structure of the scientific text and interpret the author's strategies, many of which are certainly unintentional, others of which are reasoned.

Analyses of linguistics texts show that a position for the free competition between the plural and singular rendering of the authorial subject appears in some places in the text; the selection of one variant or the other is a purely conventional matter and it is possible to replace the selected variant with the competing one without any sort of shift in meaning: If the author refers to himself/herself and to his/her own past or future texts by stating *Jak jsem již při jiných příležitostech vyložil, lze procesuální modelování řeči ve stručnosti charakterizovat následujícím způsobem...* [*As I have already demonstrated on other occasions, processual speech modeling can be briefly characterized in the following manner...*] (Kořenský 2005, 5), or by stating *Ako sme už viackrát konštatovali v osobitných štúdiách ...* [*As we have already stated more than once in our own studies...*] (Ondrejovič 2005, 196), or *Diskusiu s ďalšími podobnými hlasmi vedieme v práci Jazyk, veda o jazyku, societa, ktorú práve odovzdávame do tlače* (Ondrejovič 2005, 198), [*We hold a discussion with other similar voices in the study Language, the scientific study of language, society which we are now submitting for publication*] (Ondrejovič 2005, 198), this is the very case in which the singular form can be replaced by the plural one and vice versa; the selection of one or the other is determined by convention or by the inclination of the author toward one or another of the manners of reference. In other places in the scientific text, however, the plural or singular expression of the authorial subject is bound by content. Overall,

² The employment of the personal perspective does not mean that academic texts teem with personal pronouns. In Czech and Slovak, like in Slovene and other Slavic languages, the *I* and *we* verb forms are marked by the inflectional endings of finite verbs, e.g. *myslím, я думаю* [I think] vs *myslíme, мы думаем* [we think]. The difference between Czech and Slovak on the one hand and Russian on the other consists in the absence vs presence of the surface subject: whereas Czech and Slovak are pro-drop languages and the surface subject is non-obligatory, in Russian, indicative verb forms are accompanied with pronoun (*мы отметим*) and these forms prevail over the forms *отметим, допустим*, characteristic of imperative and conjunctive.

the only thing that can be said about these cases is that the collective *my* (*we*) includes the authorial subject plus other subjects, while the reasons why and the basis on which other subjects are also included, or even what kinds of subjects they are, do not tend to be the same.

4. The ideational, interactional and textual functions of authorial subject propositions

The individual propositions in a scientific text have differing functions. If we use Halliday's (1971) model of three functions of language, i.e. the ideational (representational), interactional, and textual functions, with the help of this differentiation (and with the awareness of the common overlap of two or of all three functions) it is possible to identify three possible cases in the use of propositions with the authorial plural and singular.

4.1 The ideational function

Some statements from the perspective of the inclusive authorial *we* have the ideational (representational) function in the text. The collective *we* refers to the object of investigation, which, in linguistic texts, is people and their linguistic activities, that is, language users, communication partners, speakers of language in general and of a specific language. The author is included in this inclusive *we* as a member of a community being analyzed, i.e. a speech community:

Mateřskému jazyku se učíme přirozenou cestou na základě imitace mluvy blízkých i vědomě (spisovnému jazyku)... [We learn our mother tongue in a natural manner on the basis of imitation of the speech of those close to us as well as consciously (standard language)...] (Krčmová 2005, 73)

It is the ideational function that legitimizes the rather extensive use of this type of plural proposition in linguistics (and extensively also humanities-oriented) texts. The replacement of the plural form *we* with the singular *I* would be absurd in many cases (see the above example). Sometimes, however, this replacement is possible if the author wishes to demonstrate some general claim about speech behavior using a telling case of his or her own behavior:

S těmito ohledy mohu například použít slovosledu (1a) nebo (1b): (1a) Za chvíli musím jít. (1b) Musím za chvíli jít. [With these considerations I can, for example, use word order (1a) or (1b): (1) In a little while I have to go. (1b) I have to go in a little while.] (Štícha 2005, 298)

In other cases – and these are the most common in linguistics and humanities-oriented texts – the perspective of the collective *we* does not relate to the activities of the speech community (the one being investigated), but to the activities of the investigating parties, i.e. of linguists. With the help of the plural perspective, the author includes him- or herself in both the domestic and international communities of linguists... and speaks using their voices:

Po niekoľko ročných diskusiách o slovenskej gramatike sme sa v slovakistike nedopracovali k jej jednotnej a všeobecne akceptovanej koncepcii. [After several years of discussion on Slovak grammar, in the field of Slovak philology we have not come to a unified and generally accepted conception.] (Sokolová 2005, 284)

The authorial *we* here can mean we scientists, we local linguists, we theoreticians, we practitioners, we experts in this or that area, we advocates of this or that methodology, we who

think about language in this or that way, we grammarians, we scholars of stylistics, we people interested in this or that area of language, and the like:

*Tam, kde je předmětem studia celý text jako součást komunikace, **narážíme na daleko výraznější meze. Meze, které bychom si měli uvědomit, abychom je mohli pojmenovat, vysvětlit a posléze překonávat.*** [Where the object of study is the entire text as a part of communication, **we come across by far more striking boundaries. Boundaries of which we should be aware, so that we can name and explain them, and eventually overcome them.**] (Krčmová 2005, 73)

A rather common use of the plural forms is connected to the author's attempts to formulate his or her thesis on a certain level of generality. In papers which have a contrastive orientation, this tendency is explained by the fact that Czech and Slovak authors, like linguists writing in other Slavic languages, are among those who conform to the intellectual style, in which it is important to "seek the agreement of the audience in the abstract, theoretical areas of contemplation" (Vassileva 2000, 79).

The author's assumption of general agreement can also be erroneous, if the discursive community is divided on the basis of language, field, generation, culture, and the like, i.e. if it does not necessarily entirely share the author's manner of thinking. In spite of this, authors assume such agreement, above all in argumentational passages: they try to gain the support of the members of the discursive community for their own vision and convince these members of their own conclusions. They extrapolate their visions (and rightly so, in most cases) to other members of the community of linguists:

*Každá lingvisticky opřená interpretace materiálu je přesvědčivá, **sami se však přistihujeme** při tom, že (typově) tutéž věc **jsme schopni interpretovat různě, že s cizími interpretacemi se shodujeme nebo je naopak odmítáme** atd.* [Every linguistics-based interpretation of material is convincing, however, **we often catch ourselves interpreting the same (type of) thing in various ways, such that we agree with the interpretations of others or, conversely, we reject them, etc.**] (Krčmová 2005, 72-73)

Inclusive formulations relating to the whole of the community are based not only on predicates in the first person plural, but also in the use of the possessive pronoun *naš* (*our*): *naše země, naše kultura, náš jazyk, naše lingvistika, naše jazykové vědomí* [*our country, our culture, our linguistics, our linguistic consciousness*] and the like.

*Zde **nám naše řečová zkušenost** praví, že pozice adverbia před slovesem je obvyklá a základní, kdežto pozice obrácená (Eva se rozesmála hlasitě) je sice principiálně možná, avšak neobvyklá.* [Here **our linguistic experience tells us** that the position of the adverb before the verb is customary and basic, while the opposite position (Eva burst out laughing loudly), though possible in principle, is not, however, customary.] (Štícha 2005, 2999).

4.2 The interactional function

The author's negotiation with the reader on whether the reader will accept the proposals and theses presented can also take the form of address. The explicit instruction to the reader(s) to participate in the process of the author's thinking, to follow the author's research journey and affiliate with the conclusions drawn, is expressed not only through the inclusive indicative, but also through the imperative, through the "act of invitation" (Swales 1990, 107). Acts of

invitation are also common in texts written by Anglo-Saxon authors (cf. the formulation *let us...*) and they are quite favored in texts by Czech and Slovak authors as well:

Porovnajme opis lexikálneho významu „kôň” v troch výkladových slovníkoch [Let us compare the paraphrase of the lexical meaning of “kôň” (horse) in three monolingual dictionaries.] (Dolník 2005, 12)

Odhlédněme teď od obsahu a soustřed' me se na výrazové prostředky. [Let us now divert our attention from the content and concentrate on the means of expression.] (Krčmová 2005, 75)

Acts formulated with the help of the inclusive *we* have not only a striking interactional function, but at the same time, they have a textual function, for they introduce new topics or new sections of the article onto the scene, they open an interpretation, a thought, and the like:

Poukážme při tejto príležitosti aspoň na niektoré rozdiely medzi našou klasickou dialektológiou a sociolingvistikou. [On this occasion, let us indicate at least some of the differences between our classic dialectology and sociolinguistics.] (Ondrejovič 2005, 201)

Text is understood here as a common discursive activity of the author and the reader(s), like in the case of the textual functions of the inclusive *we*.

4.3 The textual function

In a series of textual acts, authors comment on their manner of interpretation and provide the reader with a key to how the text should be read. Without attempting a detailed list of textual operations of which authors inform readers, I will present several examples which bear testimony to the fact that Czech as well as Slovak authors prefer the perspective of the authorial *my*. Only some of these authors also use the authorial *I* in these cases. I will begin with examples of the plural perspective, which the authors use in listing their aims in various prospective acts:

V tomto príspevku budeme tento princíp sledovať ako základ stavby lexikálneho významu... [In this contribution we will observe this principle as the basis for the construction of lexical meaning...] (Dolník 2006, 10)

Po naznačení teoretických východísk ukážeme náš prístup na riešení niektorých vybraných problémov... [After indicating the theoretical points of departure we will demonstrate our approach to solving several selected problems...] (Blanár 2006, 32).

Equally common is the use of the inclusive *we* in retrospective acts and in formulating conclusions:

V závere zrekonštruujeme pojmový základ a logickú líniu prechádzajúceho výkladu. [In the conclusion, we will reconstruct the conceptual basis and the line of logic of the preceding discussion] (Dolník 2005, 17).

Nateraz rezumujeme: jedným z prejavov prirodzenosti v ontogenéze morfológie je preferencia prototypových reprezentantov v prototypových funkciách. [We will now sum up: one of the expressions of spontaneity in the ontogenesis of morphology is the preference for prototypical representatives in prototypical functions.] (Kesselová 2006, 52)

The inclusive *we* occurs most often in acts of deduction, establishment of assumptions and reaching conclusions:

Ak hovoríme, že slovenská jazykoveda zachytila echo uvedenej paradigmatickej zmeny, rozumieme tým, že sa tak stalo v systematickejšej podobe v porovnaní s väčšinou európskych krajín s istým oneskorením... [When we say that Slovak linguistics has caught the echo of the paradigmatic changes mentioned, we mean that this has occurred in a more systematic form with a certain delay in comparison with most European countries...] (Ondrejovič 2005, 197)

If the authorial *we* has “merely” a textual function, as in

Prvý aspekt budeme demonštrovať poukazom na riadiacu silu tohto princípu vo vzťahu k stavbe lexikálneho významu. [We will demonstrate the first aspect by indicating the guiding power of this principle in relation to the construction of lexical meaning.] (Dolník 2006, 11),

it can be, in fact, very easily replaced by the singular perspective, as I have already mentioned above. The choice depends on the use and preferences of the author:

Na úvod stručne vysvetlím dva kľúčové pojmy vo svojom príspevku. [To begin with, I will briefly explain two key concepts in my contribution.] (Dudok 2005, 123)
Záverom len tolko: pro osvetľovaní nastolených otázok som v komplexnom riešení uplatňoval metodický postoj z pozícií onomastiky. [In conclusion only this: to illuminate the questions put forth, in a complex solution I have utilized the methodical approach from the position of onomastics.] (Blanár 2006, 37)

The latter practice, i.e., the preference for the *I* pronoun can also be perceived as a direct impact of manuals for academic writing in English and theoretical considerations on the nature of scientific discourse: “...we reject the idea that academic writing is objective and impersonal... Taking responsibility for your ideas commits you to truthfulness. The *I* makes you write your ideas, thoughts and convictions” (Ivanič – Simpson 1992, 144).

The authorial singular in Czech and Slovak research articles tends to be more common in textual acts which express the opinion of the author, in references to his or her own concepts and definitions of phenomena:

Za jazykový atraktor považujem taký jazykový výraz... [I consider such a linguistic expression to be a linguistic attractor...] (Dudok 2005, 123)

The authorial singular is also selected when the author refers not only to his or her own textual subject, but also to his or biographical or research ego, etc.

Předesílám, že bych se v tomto příspěvku chtěla vyhnout jakémukoli moralizování, které mi nepřísluší a je mi zcela cizí. [In this contribution, I state in advance that I would like to avoid any sort of moralizing which is not appropriate and is entirely foreign to me.] (Hoffmannová 2005, 39)

On the other hand, if authors want to avoid such a singular perspective, they can also talk about themselves, as I have already mentioned, in the third person.

Zkušenost z práce se studenty, kde autorka tohoto příspěvku uvedenou metodu v seminářích stylistiky českého jazyka od 80. let vypracovávala, ukazuje její nosnost. [Experience from working with students, where the author of this contribution developed the described method in Czech stylistics seminars beginning in the 80s, demonstrates its capacity.] (Krčmová 2005, 76)

5. Discussion

The depiction of the author in a scientific text is, of course, also constructed in ways other than by using self-reference, or in some cases by including him or herself in the discursive community or by speaking for oneself and about oneself. If we follow the ideational, interactional and textual functions of authorial propositions expressed in first person, we can observe quite well what the author is actually doing with the text and how he or she is proceeding, introducing topics, arguing and reasoning. The preference for the authorial *we* in Czech and Slovak texts is connected to the rather high level of contemplation in these texts, through the consideration of possibilities (formulations such as *jestliže...*, *pak... (if..., then...)* are common) and the hypothetical nature of judgments, whose expression strengthens the modalized nature of the theses

Spomínaný príklad dobre znázorňuje stopu tohto pôdorysu: keď zjednotíme množinu komponentov z troch opisov, zreteľne sa nám ukazujú príznaky zodpovedajúce prirodzenej orientácii... [The recalled example well illustrates the trace of this pattern: if we unify the collection of components from the three paraphrases, signs of the corresponding natural orientation appear to us clearly...] (Dolník 2005, 13)

Ak sa však vzdialíme od jazykovej komplexity a ponoríme sa do čiastkového problému, situácia nie je taká neprehľadná a zmätočná. [However, if we distance ourselves from linguistic complexity and submerge ourselves in the individual problem, the situation is not so non-transparent and confusing.] (Dudok 2005, 124)

Ak sa však na jazyk pozeráme z aspektu jeho používania, v jeho zmätočnom stave je už zakotvený aj aktuálny poriadok [However, if we look at language from the perspective of its use, actual order is already grounded in its confusing state.] (Dudok 2005, 128)

Ak by sme mali toto postavenie vyjadriť trochu súčasnejšou metaforou, mohli by sme to formulovať aj tak... [If we had to express this condition using a slightly contemporary metaphor, we could also formulate it in this way...] (Ondrejovič 2005, 198)

Czech and Slovak linguistics texts share a rather great number of common features here (Czech texts are analyzed from the perspective of modality in Daneš – Čmejrková 1997 and Čmejrková – Daneš 1997), which is the result of not only their many years of mutual contact, but also of their common affiliation with the Central European intellectual style. This style is, of course, currently subjected to the significant influence of Anglo-Saxon communicative norms, which are characterized by a striking singular perspective, an individualized authorial subject and rather resolute formulation of the individual findings. (This is most evident in texts from the genre of “case studies”, which – in Galtung’s 1981, 1985 terms – can be compared to individual small pyramids with a strong base of material which compete with large pyramids of unifying intellectual constructs). This is why it is not a coincidence that the author naturally uses the authorial singular when speaking about his or her own collection of material, work with a language corpus, componential analysis, or a concrete method:

Provedl jsem řadu sond do korpusu SYN 2000, týkajících se slovosledných struktur s adverbiem v bezprostřední posloupnosti se substantivem a slovesem na začátku věty.

Rešerše jsem omezil na nekvalifikační adverbia vyjadřující různé okolnosti (časové, místní aj.) nebo významy modální. Zjišťoval jsem přítom frekvenci struktur různé obecnosti... [I have done a series of probes into the corpus SYN 2000 concerning word-order structures with the adverb in the immediate succession to the substantive and with the verb at the beginning of the sentence. I limited this search to non-qualifying adverbs expressing various circumstances (time, place, etc., or modal meanings). In doing this, I investigated the frequency of structures of varying levels of commonality...] (Štícha 2005, 300)

When this same author formulates more general conclusions, his expressional instinct leads him to the selection of the plural perspective:

Studujeme-li český slovosled kontrastivně se slovosledem německým, zjistíme, že v němčině jsou poměrně běžné věty, v nichž jsou kvalifikační adverbia tematizována i tehdy, mají-li substantivní podmět na konci nebo uprostřed věty v postpozici za slovesem [If we study Czech word order in contrast to German word order, we discover that in German, sentences in which qualifying adverbs are thematized even when they have a substantive subject at the end of the sentence or in the middle of it in post-position after the verb, are fairly common.] (Štícha 2005, 300)

Statistical quantitative information on how many singular and plural propositions occur in the texts by authors from various linguistic and cultural communities are noteworthy. They demonstrate a great predominance of singular propositions among Anglo-Saxon authors, above all in the introductory and concluding passages of the texts, while in the central argumentative passages, the Anglo-Saxon authors also use the inclusive plural perspective (cf. Vassileva 2000). This information also bears testimony to various uses of scientific writing, which differs in individual languages and cultures, various authorial aims and intellectual styles.

In this contribution, I was not concerned with the quantitative analysis of authorial strategies (quantitative information about Czech linguistics texts can be found in Čmejrková 2006 and forthcoming). I have attempted to determine how findings from Czech scientific expression (namely, concerning the representation of the author of the scientific text) relate to the Slovak scientific style. I have focused on the texts gathered in the volume *Jazyk a komunikácia v súvislostiach* [*Language and communication in contingency*] (2005), in which contributions from Czech and Slovak authors can be found next to one another. I apologize to the authors for reading their articles (among others and not only) from the analytical perspective described, and I ask for the understanding of those whom I cite.

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