

NOMINAL TENDENCIES IN ENGLISH AND THEIR SLOVAK EQUIVALENTS IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract

Focusing on grammatical-semantic features of both English and Slovak, we decided to analyse texts written in English and their translations into Slovak. Our research is based on nominal tendencies in English that enable native speakers to describe reality. From the stylistic perspective, this nominal character of English can make difficulty for translators as this accumulation of nominal elements seems to be awkward in Slovak. Despite the fact that nominal phrases are used more frequently in administrative and scientific texts, our research outlines the comparison of the language used in English literary texts and their translations into Slovak, focusing on the language of the narrator and the language of characters. In conclusion, we will present approaches to translating nominal structures into a synthetic language.

Key words: nominalisation, synthetic languages, contemporary literary prose, translation

1. INTRODUCTION

Using different languages requires not only mastering the target language properly, but mastering the mother tongue as well, since in real life most of us are becoming mediators for those who do not speak one of them. This challenge is very typical for Europeans, as they live in a multilingual community and communicating and making themselves understood is one of the necessities of their everyday life. Mediators are expected to transfer the semantic content of the message and assure that the final output (product) will meet all the language aspects of the target language on both sides, respecting all the formal structures and typical language behavior at the level of single linguistic dimensions.

Comparing English with Slovak (one of Slavonic languages, apart from Russian, Polish, Czech and others), the focus of our research is on current trends in modern English, specifically on nominalisation. As far as English is concerned, it is important to mention that it has a tendency to describe a reality by means of nominal structures, while Slovak shows preference for verbal predication. When the nominal phrase is automatically used in Slovak without taking into account the system differences such as language constructs, it can affect either the natural word order of the sentences or it makes comprehension more difficult. On the other hand, specific language used in technical, scientific and academic texts require a more condensed way of expressing content concerning factual information, opinions and their justification, etc. In specific contexts, Slovak enables scientists and academists to express the conceptual content of any level of abstraction using nominal constructions alongside with verbal constructions as finite verb forms are the bearers of the dynamism and intensity of the action or process depicted in words.

To discuss nominal tendencies, we decided to use different sources for presenting samples:

- an English academic text – International perspectives on materials in ELT (IPM), published in 2014, edited by Sue Garton and Kathleen Graves, to illustrate the process of nominalisation
- English and Slovak literary texts – Gray Mountain by John Grisham, published in 2015, and its translation into Slovak, to compare the process of nominalisation in the mentioned two languages.

2. NOMINAL TENDENCIES

From the Slovak linguistic perspective, discussing nominal tendencies in English requires to mention the Czech applied linguists who were the members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, later called officially the Prague School of Linguistics. Professor Mathesius analysed languages in terms of their specific characteristics and his approach to language study was called linguistic characterology. He focused on two processes that underlie any act of communication which results in producing utterances such as the process of naming units (functional onomatology) and the process in which units are linked into mutual relations (functional syntax). His work concerning complex condensation in modern English was later fine-tuned by Vachek completing Mathesius's results in synchronic comparison by diachronic approaches to language development. The linguists of the Prague School analysed different forms of predication, focusing on the function of the nouns and adjectives in predication. Their attention was paid primarily to verb-nominal structures, in which predication consists of two different elements, verbs whose paradigms include grammatical categories and nouns or noun phrases that are a focus of the semantic functions (*to have a bath, to be in a hurry*). The diachronic approach confirmed the fact that the English language used to be more synthetic, more verbal, but since the 14th century it has changed. Some of the influences are due to French, for example, taking borrowings such as *prendre une decision – make a decision* (Vachek, 1978). Different tendencies are seen in the development of Slovak, in which condensing structures such as gerunds, -ing participles, -ed participles and infinitives were frequently used but now are considered old-fashioned or extinct in modern Slovak.

Focusing on the structure of the English sentence as a whole, English tends to express some actions, expressed in Slovak by subordinate clauses, by non-sentence elements of the main clause. The English sentence structure is then more compact, in other words, condensed. This phenomenon in the language was called complex condensation for its ability to express entire complexes of content (Mathesius, 1975). The ability to express ideas in a compact and condensed way is related to the use of non-finite verb forms (participles and gerund) and nominal tendencies (*My apologies*) or verbal-nominal tendencies (*to get ready*).

2.1. Nominalisation

Slavonic languages show a preference for verbal predication, while English tends to word its predictions nominally. The reasons for this difference can be seen in the shift of the semantic centre of gravity from the finite verb on to the nominal element of predication resulted from weaker dynamism of the English finite verb form (Vachek, 1955). On the other hand, it cannot be concluded that Slovak texts do not comprise nominal inventory if it is important to express the conceptual content, for example, in technical, scientific and academic texts.

According to Carter & McCarthy (2006), nominalisation is a process that uses a noun phrase to express a meaning more typically associated with an item from another parts of speech (word class), for example, nouns can express verb-type meanings and adjective-type meanings. Noun phrases are frequently used in academic style as an alternative to longer, clausal constructions, e.g. *There may be hesitation in adapting the textbook.....* (Bosompem, 2014, p. 111) comparing it with *Teachers may hesitate whether they can adapt the textbook.....*

The formality of the English text is accomplished by one or more nominalised forms. Nouns can be derived from different parts of speech to which they are related. Sometimes they can be formed metaphorically rather than morphologically, for example, *All the groups could reach the goals* can be nominalised as *The goals of the groups were attainable* (Tibbitts & Pashby, 2014, p. 229). The analysed text provided more samples, in which metaphorical transfer was recognisable, e.g. the sentence *... there is the absence of a formal directive by the school authorities* (Bosompem, 2014, p. 111) might be transformed into the sentence *....as school authorities do not provide a formal directive.*

Nominalised forms can be also used when it is not necessary to make a reference to an agent as it is less important. For example, the sentence *In US schools, teachers assess their students interactions to pinpoint what students can do with language* might be nominalised in the academic book - *In US schools, assessment of student interactions is used to pinpoint what students can do with language*.

Nominalisation in academic style is used as an alternative to longer, clausal constructions. The process of nominalisation enables the writer to integrate a considerable amount of information into the noun-phrase representing the subject or object in the clause, for example, ... *the introduction of new coursebooks alone may not lead to changes in practice* (Garton and Graves, 2014, p. 9) instead of *when new coursebooks alone are introduced, it may not lead to changes in practice*. Nominalisations can include nouns which express verb-type meanings and adjective-type meanings. While the previous sample refers to a verb-type meaning, the following one concerns an adjective-type meaning – *It will be important to review the relevance of the cultural content of the book, the suitability and appeal of the topics it includes.....*(Richards, 2014, p. 31), which might be compared with the transformed sentences such as *It will be important to review if the cultural content of the book is relevant and the topics are suitable.....*

Nominalisation may be seen as the opposite of clefting in that two clauses are condensed into one, for example, *The first stage was a content analysis of the four English textbooks used in public middle schools in Algeria* (Messekher, 2014, p. 75) which might be transformed into a complex sentence, for example, *It was the first stage, in which the content of the four English textbooks that are used in public middle schools in Algeria was analysed. .*

The nominalised clause typically represents old, background or given information, and the complement represents new, important information: *The choices of the writer can send different kinds of messages to students* (Richards, 2014, p. 26).

Adjective forms of verbs along with their complements may condense information in the clause: *The novice teachers were not willing to be critical of the textbooks and discussed the need to supplement what was in them...* which might be transformed into a sentence *The novice teachers do not want to criticize the textbooks and discussed that it is necessary to supplement what was in them ...* in spoken academic mode. Nominalisation comprising forming a noun from other parts of speech, apart from verbs, most commonly from adjectives, for example, ... *most of the teachers reported their satisfaction with the inclusion of Algeria in the teaching of culture* (Messkher, 2014, p. 82) instead of using a dependent clause ... *most of the teachers reported that they were satisfied with the inclusion of Algeria in the teaching of culture*. The condensed sentences are characterized by a lot of prepositional phrases. Another example may be seen in the sentences when adjective (e.g. long) is nominalised into a noun (e.g. length), for example, *Institutional factors include length and intensity of the English courses* (Richards, 2014, p. 28) might be transformed into a less condensed sentence, for example, *Institutional factors include long and intensive English courses*.

Another type of nominalised structure, common in everyday usage, is the delexical verb phrase + noun phrase structure. The most common delexical verbs comprise *go, get, make, do, take*. In the analyzed academic book, the most frequent delexical verb was *make* used in expressions such as *make a decision, make a commitment, make an attempt*, for example, *Decisions have to be made whose values and culture will be presented in the book* (Richards, 2014, p. 27), *Once a commitment is made to publish the book.....* (Richards, 2014, p. 22) or *In Albania, among other reforms, attempts are being made to develop new national curricula and change the philosophical orientation of teachers and students* (Seferaj, 2014, p. 90).

Delexical structures can offer an informal equivalent to a full lexical verb phrase (Side and Wellman, 1999) so the sentence *We pointed out in the introduction that there is surprisingly little written about materials users* (Garton and Graves, 2014, p. 7) can be more informal if we transform the expression *to point out* into the expression *to make a point of*, for example, *In the introduction, we made a point of the fact that there is surprisingly little written about materials users....* According to Side and Wellman (1999), the delexical structures are partly a matter of collocation, for example, *to get a call, to give an opportunity*, etc. *English academic texts provide samples such as the Story Reading Project*

gives many opportunities to use materials to practice and repeat target language (Tibbitts & Pashby, 2014, p. 235).

In academic and more formal styles, a noun-form of a verb as subject is often used in order to turn the verb into the theme and to give extra focus to the rheme – *Training in materials analysis and evaluation can also help teachers to make principled decisions about the use of textbooks the design and creation of their own supplementary activities* (Humphries, 2014, p. 266).

2.2. The –ing participle functioning as the gerund

Apart from the –ed participle and infinitives, the -ing participle belongs to the group of non-finite verb forms, which can make English sentences more condensed. Some grammarians (Quirk et al., 1999) distinguish between –ing participles and gerunds, others (Murphy, 1994, Penston, 2005) claim that the term –ing form is used instead of gerund. According to Carter, McCarthy (2011), the -ing form functions as the gerund, which is a noun-like (nominal) form which can occur as the head of a noun phrase – *Textbook writing thus involves more than making decisions about how to teach what English is* (Richards, 2014, p. 27) or as the complement of a preposition – *Teachers can create a bridge between home culture and school culture by utilizing students fund of knowledge, ...* (Messekher, 2014, p. 72). Due to the participle, the writer was able to put two ideas into one sentence and at the same time to divide the action into two elements, one of which expresses the main information (Teachers can create a bridge between home culture and school culture) and the second one informs about the conditions of the action (by utilising students fund of knowledge).

The difference between the two mentioned languages is recognisable since the Slovak word *výučba* in the phrase *výučba angličtiny* is a genuine noun postmodified by another noun phrase (*angličtina*) in contrast with English, in which the word *teaching* in the phrase *teaching English* is the -ing form functioning as the gerund. The gerund is a noun-like (nominal) form which can occur as the head of a noun phrase or as the complement of a preposition (Carter, McCarthy, 2011). The gerund behaves differently from other English nouns, for example, it does not need a determiner as in the phrase the teaching of English. In Modern English, the expression *teaching English* is used more frequently as it is considered a natural flow of language.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY LITERARY TEXTS

Taking the previously mentioned views into account, it is necessary to justify our selection of contemporary literary prose as a source of samples concerning nominal tendencies. According to Vachek (1976) and Tárnayiková (2007), literary texts comprise nominal expression of the ideas as it contributes to plot development – nominal constructions like condensers create background for the plot line, which is depicted by descriptive passages.

Each literary text consists of the language of the narrator and that of characters. In our analysis, we decided to focus on both, trying to excerpt samples referring to nominal tendencies in English and their equivalents in Slovak. In the following lines, we will present our findings systemised in terms of the previously discussed concepts, which resulted in the classification as follows.

3.1. Functional sentence perspective

To formulate sentences clearly, predominantly in writing, it is important not to ignore the functional approach of the writer. Each utterance usually consists of its basis (a known fact or information) that is called the theme, which is based either on the information from the previous sentences or the context and/or co-text and the nucleus of the utterance (the information that is to be a new one), called the rheme. Due to the fixed word order in English, there are several thematic and rhematic elements which enable the writers to organise their utterances correctly to avoid misinterpreting by the reader.

The nominalised clause typically represents old, background or given information, and the complement represents new, important information. A lot of information can be packed into a noun phrase, which makes sentences shorter and leaves the rest of the sentence free to add new information, for example, *Upon completion one of his buildings, he commissioned a sculptor to replicate it on a smaller scale.....* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 2) translated into Slovak by a subordinate clause (an adverbial clause of time) – *Vždy keď dokončili stavbu, objednal si u suchára presné repliky v malom....* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 6).

Nominalisation is preferably used due to the typical sentence pattern in English – sentences start with the subject of the sentence, which is primarily expressed by nouns, for example, *The horror was in the waiting – the unknown, the insomnia, the ulcers* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 1) translated into Slovak by an adjective – *Najhoršie bolo čakanie – neistota, nespavosť, žalúdočné vredy* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 5). In both languages, communicative dynamism is distributed over sentence elements, respecting the relations between functional sentence perspective and word order.

Nominalisation is used to change the emphasis of the sentence. The conversion of the verb *intend* into a noun phrase in the sentence *The intent of the new federal law was to sharply reduce exposure to coal dust* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 188) enabled the writer to shift the focus of the sentence on the action – *sharply reduce* – and this focus was kept in the Slovak translation *Zámerom nového federálneho zákon bolo výrazne obmedziť prácu v prašnom prostredí* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 188).

3.2. Impersonality in the utterance

Nominalised forms can sometimes be used without reference to an agent and in certain contexts this can mean the cause or agent can be concealed or made less important. Nominalisation can make the utterance more impersonal. The English sentence *Through the generosity of friends and neighbors, and the tireless efforts of his family, the supply of oxygen was never depleted* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 190) was translated as *Vďaka štedrosti susedov a priateľov, aj neúnavnosti rodiny, mu nikdy nechýbal kyslík* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 161), in which the noun phrase *the supply of oxygen* was translated by the verb phrase *mu nechýbal kyslík* in the active, which is more natural in the Slovak language.

3.3. Informality in the utterance

The type of nominalised structures, common in everyday usage, is the delexical verb phrase + noun phrase structure. Delexical verbs include *go, get, make, do, take*. Delexical structures often offer an informal equivalent to a full lexical verb phrase, for example, *She made some brief opening remarks, and called Pamella to the witness stand* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 371) This sentence was translated by a single sentence *Po úvodných slovách predvolala Pamelu ako svedkyňu* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 306), in which an independent clause (She made some brief opening remarks) was changed into a nominalised structure in Slovak (After the opening words, she summoned Pamela as a witness). On the other hand, several samples verified our assumptions that English delexical verb phrases + noun phrase structures will be translated into Slovak as verb phrases, for example, *Donovan took a deep breath and glanced at Samantha* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 248) comparing it with *Donovan sa zhlboka nadýchol a pozrel na Samanthu* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 208), or *She swallowed and took a sip of port* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 367) comparing it with *Samantha sa napila portského* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 303). In these samples it is evident that English delexical verb phrases + noun phrases were translated by Slovak verb phrases, however, these structures are more common when the English noun is premodified by the adjective and Slovak translations tend to use verb phrases + adverbial phrases, for example, *She took long, solitary walks through lower Manhattan* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 355) comparing it with *Chodila na dlhé osamelé prechádzky po dolnom Manhattane* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 292).

Some nominalised structures can be considered words in collocation, for example, *have lunch, take a photograph, give welcome, make progress*, etc., which have their equivalents in Slovak verb phrase structures, for example, *She had lunch with Henry, who had been pestering her, and realized they had*

nothing in common (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 355) comparing it with *Obedovala s Henrym, ktorý ju ustavične naháňal a uvedomila si, že ich už nič nespája* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 292).

4. CONCLUSION

This article is only a brief introduction to a topic which needs a deep analysis and data collected from different sources. We wanted to re-bring attention to the comparison of languages from and to which mediation might be performed in our context. A complex nominal phrase is a result of the process called nominalisation, during which the original verb predicates formed into noun phrases by means of word formation processes. The process of nominalisation allows an extended explanation to be condensed into a complex noun phrase, and a verb phrase represents an activity, generalised into an effect. The same phenomenon is seen in Slovak technical, scientific and academic texts, but it is necessary to mention that this use of nominal constructions is accompanied by a big number of finite verb forms as finite verbs are more dynamic in character than nouns. In Slovak, finite verbs and subordinate clauses play an important part in transferring the same message expressed by English complex condensation.

Due to the fact that English prefers a complex and consistent perception of reality, condensers seem to be a proper tool of complementing the main idea by supplementary information, which can be omitted if necessary. Slovak tends to dissociate an utterance into a numerous partial elements and therefore nominalisation presents a marginal tendency. According to Vachek (1955), Czech sometimes behaves more nominally than English, which might be stated about Slovak as well. In our research, we could find those such samples, for example, *Jedna z obetí, rekultivované miesto bane* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 139) in which a nominal structure was expressed by a clause *A casualty, a reclaimed site that was once a strip mine* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 139) in the original English version.

From the syntactic perspective, an English nominal phrase is a complex structure due to its number of components and the hierarchical relations between them. Despite the fact that the nominal phrase does not include a verb itself, it can bear the meaning and can function as a full sentence. According to Quirk et al. (1985), any long sentence can be transformed into long nominal phrases, which results in the decrease of explicitness but an increase in density and compactness of the expressed ideas. It means that the relations between the participants of the actions are not expressed clearly and unambiguously, which is enabled by a verb predication due to the potential of verbs to express an action dynamically. Sometimes nominalisation can be seen as a way of expressing the ideas that seem to be lost in the prepositional phrases, however, the meaning is becoming briefer and hold together syntactically.

Nominal tendencies cause weakening of the dynamism of English verbs, due to which a significant element of predication is not a verb itself, but nominal complementation. What is more, nominalisation is a broader concept that covers different kinds of tendencies such as verbless clauses, for example, *Congrats on the verdict down there* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 247), translated into Slovak by a verb clause – *Blahoželám k verdiktu* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 207) or the use of the condensed prepositional phrases, for example, *I play matchmaker between the guys with the cash and the guys with the cases* (Grisham^a, 2015, 249) translated into Slovak by clauses *Som čosi ako sprostredkovateľ medzi ľuďmi, ktorí majú peniaze a ľuďmi, ktorí majú prípady* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 209).

Nominal structures using juxtaposed substantives are very specific and many other languages have problems while translating them into their own sentence structures. In some cases, if the expression needs an extra clause, the translator can replace it with another expression – *Such talk bored Samantha, but she gamely held on, sipping coffee in her pajamas and listening to the nonstop church bells* (Grisham^a, 2015, p. 182) –*a počúvala vyzváňanie kostolných zvonov* (Grisham^b, 2015, p. 153). The translator decided to change the expression *nonstop* into a noun which means a long ringing process since translating *non-stop* would have required a clause rather than one-word expression and changed the noun *church* into an adjective (*kostolný*). In Slovak, it is not possible to put two nouns together in the structure, in which the first one functions as an adjective as it can be seen in English.

Focusing on nominalisation, we were to mention the –ing participle functioning as the gerund since it is not so common in the Slovak language as it used to be, being considered old-fashioned or archaic in some contexts. In contemporary Slovak, they are used predominantly in belles-lettres and specific texts, for example, law documents. As we have mentioned before, nominal tendencies need research based on collecting data from different sources which will support assumptions that are generally believed in. Nominalisation as a broader concept needs more research based on the analysis of different condensers.

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