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## *I AS THE OTHER, THE OTHER AS I*

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Whatever new approaches to self-identity may appear in scholarly research, the linguistic aspect of the problem remains vitally important. The question of the speaker's identity (especially in connection with the *other*), defined and manifested linguistically, relates to the notion of selfhood, which is central for the modern studies of the individual's place within society. In the canonical situation of speech everything a person says relates to him as to the centre of the communication act, and the temporal-spatial-personal-social coordinates are set by the implicit existence of the speaker. There are cases, however, when this canonical situation is modified, and two of such modifications are in the focus of the paper. In the first case the speaker identifies himself with another person, and as a result the latter is endowed with subjectivity and individualization. The second is reference to oneself in the third person, the so-called illeism, which objectifies one's selfhood and leads to self-distancing. The two processes result in intricate dynamics of relations that the speaker constructs with oneself and the *other*, as well as in psychological connotations of these interrelations. The aim of the present research is to examine the semantic and pragmatic issues within these modifications.

**Keywords:** *egocentrism, illeism, self-reference, individualization, identity, social self.*

### **Introduction**

Gottlieb Fichte, the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher famous for his insights into human self-consciousness and self-awareness, according to O. Jespersen, celebrated not his son's birthday but the day when the child first used the word *I* (Jespersen, 1946, p.128). It can be assumed that this symbolic 'initiation rite' signaling the achievement of a certain psychological state reflects the linguistic characteristics of the first person pronoun. The use of this pronoun indicates the speaker's awareness of his self, as opposed to others, as well as his reference to himself as the speaker. As might be

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expected, most definitions of the pronoun *I*, which have been suggested by philosophers, psychologists, and of course linguists, focus on these features. According to E. Benveniste's pivotal formula, "*I* signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*'" (Benveniste, 1971, p.252).

Speech is centered on the pronoun *I*, because all that is said or written is an act in which the speaker's *ego* is necessarily present either explicitly or implicitly. The following well-known quote from J. Lyons emphasizes the egocentric nature of communication: "The canonical situation-of-utterance is egocentric in the sense that the speaker, by virtue of being the speaker, casts himself in the role of *ego* and relates everything to his viewpoint" (Lyons, 1979, p. 638).

In addition to the established egocentricity of speech organisation, language has lexical units called 'egocentric words', or 'egocentric particulars' that are related to the pronoun *I* so closely that their meaning depends on their reference to the speaker. As to the pronominal class, the pronoun *I*, naturally, has an even greater weight in it, not only because it is basic to the speech act itself, but also because the status of a number of pronouns is defined through their relations with the first person pronoun. This is the case with the generic pronouns *one*, *you* and *we*. O. Dahl, for instance, unites the generic and personal pronouns and calls them 'egocentric': "... generic pronouns are semantically quite close to first and second person pronouns. Even when generic pronouns are not just a way of talking about oneself without sounding too pretentious they are used to describe the world the way it looks from the participants' point of view" (Dahl, 1997, p. 10).

The concept underlying the theory of pronominal egocentricity is the notion of subjectivity introduced by E. Benveniste, further developed in the works of O.Seliviorstova. According to O.Seliviorstova, a word contains information both about its referent and about the manner in which this referent is presented semantically. There are three main forms of presentation of the referent – as a class, a member of a class and as an individual, or personality. The meaning of pronouns consists of two layers of characterization – the information of how the referent is presented and that of the address of the referent, or indication. In these terms, the pronouns *I* and *you* can be described as words which characterize their referent as a personality, as an integral individual ( they have the feature of subjectivity in E.Benveniste's terms ). The second semantic component is the address of the referent, in the case of *I* and *you* corresponding to the speaker and the listener respectively (Seliviorstova, 1988).

Two patterns will be examined in this article to show two contrasting processes -- subjectivation of the *other* and objectivation of the speaker's self. There is a construction of the pattern *I am X*, where *X* is another person's name, in which the speaker identifies himself with another person. In this case the speaker attributes the quality of an individual to the *other*, which results in conveying an additional meaning. On the other hand, though language possesses a word specifically designed for the

individualization and indication of the speaker (the pronoun *I*), languages use various means corresponding to the third person, such as anthroponyms, generic pronouns, phrases like *your humble servant*, *the author*, and the like for the speaker's self-reference. This practice of using the third person instead of the first is known as *illeism* (from the Latin *ille* – *he, that one*).

The contrast between the first person and the third has traditionally been studied along the lines of narrative modes. In the works of Yu. Lotman (1971), M. Bakhtin (1984), M. Fludernik (1996), J. Manfred (2021) narrative perspectives are examined in the light of the predominant use of either the first or the third person. In A. Alec, A. Marzuki et al. (2022) discourse analysis is applied to illeism to reveal how the illeistic use functions within the poem and what is the interpretation of the third-person self-reference in the literary text.

The aim of the present research is to explore the semantic and pragmatic features of the two mentioned constructions in which the first and third persons are employed in a non-conventional way. The result of this use is a complex configuration of the concepts of the *ego* and the *other*.

### Egocentrism vs illeism

As suggested above, the use of the first person pronoun is critical for a person's awareness of the world. Actually, the correct application of this word shows that the child begins to make a distinction between his *ego* and other people, therefore the use of the pronoun *I* indicates the starting point of self-perception. In addition, this procedure is inevitably accompanied by a process of a person's perception of the *other*. Accordingly, the semantic structure of the pronoun *I* consists of the following components: first, the feature of individualization and presentation of the referent as unique, and second, that of identifying the referent with the speaking participant of speech. The features of uniqueness and individualization in the meaning of *I* are self-evident, a simple linguistic test being that of the opposition of *I* vs *we*. As there cannot be more than one referent of the word *I*, *we* cannot be the plural of *I*, or as J. Lyons states, *we* is not the plural of *I* in the same way as *boys* and *cows* are the plural of *boy* and *cow* (Lyons, 1979, p. 293).

The pronoun *you* also characterizes its referent as an individual, its localization being that of the addressee of speech. As to the third person pronoun, it has been defined as a non-participant of the act of speech since ancient grammaticists. According to J. Lyons, the third person is 'essentially a negative notion' because it is characterized by not being sender or addressee (Lyons 1979, p. 638). Besides, the third person pronoun does not characterize its referent as a personality, which is the basic difference between the latter and the pronouns *I* and *you*.

Therefore the use of the third person to refer to a unique personality, the main participant of the speech act ( and sometimes also instead of the second person to refer

to the addressee), is a deliberate and marked action. In such cases the speaker is presented as a non-participant of the act of speech who is identical to the speaker. The addressor in this case is deprived of subjectivity, or individualization, as a result, referring to oneself in a way in which another person would refer to him as an object of speech.

There can be an opposite procedure, when the speaker identifies oneself with another person, using the latter's anthroponym. By doing this the speaker provides the referent of that name with two characteristic features – the role of the central participant of speech (the speaker) and the semantic feature of individualization.

### ***I am X***

As we have said before, the model *I am X* with the speaker's name for *X* (and its synonymous patterns) is superfluous in a canonical situation of speech. The speaker may face the necessity to identify oneself in a few routine cases, for instance, for self-introduction or in physically monolocutive situations like mentioning one's name on the telephone without a caller display or from behind a closed door. Hence, the use of *I* in a copulative pattern with the speaker's name as predicative is only reserved for certain occasions.

Let us consider the famous slogan *I'm Charlie (Je suis Charlie)*. This slogan and logo were created by French art director Joachim Roncin and adopted by supporters of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It was made after the 7 January 2015 shooting in which twelve people were killed at the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*.

Apparently, a number of linguistic transformations are present in the creation of this slogan. First of all, the name of the newspaper, and not of a person, is attributed to everyone who uses it. So the idea of freedom underlying the use of the name undergoes personification. The feature of uniqueness associated with *I*, which is a marker for this pronoun, is certainly neutralized because the purpose of the slogan is just the opposite - - to multiply those who are identified with *Charlie Hebdo*. Accordingly, *I* stands for a whole multitude of people and representatives of press. At the same time, the pragmatic feature of speaker indication is present and essential. The purpose is to state that each utterer of the statement, whether appearing on a T-shirt, a sticker, a placard, a hashtag on the website (these were the forms in which the sentence soon emerged) is saying that he or she, as the case may be, is Charlie. Hence, we deal with the pragmatic mechanism of appropriation in E. Benveniste's terms -- every user who is the speaker/writer of the statement appropriates the slogan. A performative act of self-nomination following the pattern *I hereby name myself Charlie* is obviously the case. The next feature, that of subjectivity, is also present in the semantics of *I* in this slogan. If we recall E. Benveniste's formula that *I* is the one who says *I*, we will see that the feature of subjectivity is retained. This results in an individualized way of presenting

the personified newspaper, in an act of solidarity and empathy in which the speaker is not *with* the concept of freedom and the people who fight for it, but *is* the idea itself and hence, *is* a freedom champion.

So the semantic structure of the slogan *I am Charlie* is roughly this: *I, as an individual, and I as the speaker, speak out for freedom of self-expression*. The channels through which the message was transmitted also make this pragmatic combination of meanings very specific. The slogan was first used on Twitter. The website of *Charlie Hebdo* went offline shortly after the shooting, and it was soon translated in seven languages. The statement was used as computer-printed or hand-made placards and stickers, and displayed on mobile phones at vigils, and on many websites, particularly media sites.

Media also drew comparisons to the famous sentence *I'm Spartacus* in the well-known scene in the film *Spartacus* of 1960. At the beginning of this scene the statement *I'm Spartacus* said by Spartacus himself is that of self-identification, because he reveals his identity to save the other slaves from punishment. Interestingly, his friend simultaneously stands up calling himself by this name, at once dispossessing the referent of the feature of being unique. After this dozens of other slaves stand up saying *I'm Spartacus*, and the utterance thus acquires a double function. One is to mislead the punishers, and the second is to express solidarity, sharing the identity and consequently the fate of Spartacus, and pragmatically appropriating the indication and individualization functions of *I*.

Another parallel could be drawn with the use of *I* in ritual texts, for example in prayers or liturgical sacred songs like Armenian *Sharakans*. Any person saying the prayer appropriates the *I* of the speaker, and by reproducing the canonical text in the first person perspective 'creates' it anew.

We can compare *I am Charlie* with slogans of a similar kind which were popular at the beginning of 70's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were slogans *Freedom to Angela Davis* or *Free Angela Davies*, in support of the then famous woman with a peculiar hairdo who fought for the rights of Afro-Americans, and was involved in the Black Panther Party during the Civil Rights Movement. This statement obviously reflects the contrast between the first and the third person, the opposition that is lost in the recent *I am Charlie* slogan. In Davies' case the person demanding her freedom is clearly different from the person who is being supported.

Equating the first and third persons, when the basic opposition between personality and non-personality is neutralized, has sociolinguistic implications. The *I* of the Charlie slogan states: *I speak for someone who is not the other, but is myself*. This is an expression of absolute empathy on the part of the speaker, who by extension becomes a supporter of some idea, in this case, of freedom of speech and resistance to armed threats. The self-awareness of every citizen is heightened in comparison with the old slogans, because the understanding of one's own significance is reflected in the

identification of the supporter and the supported. We can say that though the figure of the speaker is multiplied, the semiotic way of presenting the referent as a personality is not eliminated, but contrary to expectation, this semantic component is even reinforced.

### Third person instead of first

The use of a noun or a noun phrase instead of *I* to refer to the speaker is evidently a case of oppositional substitution in which the basic opposition between the first and the third person lexical entities comes to the fore. Illeism is first of all attributed to child's speech. Children, as is well known, have difficulty understanding the shifting nature of personal pronouns, so they can employ a noun both in self-reference and in reference to the addressee. This is a typical and easily explainable use -- children imitate adults when they repeatedly hear their parents' use of nouns, a practice called 'parental third person': *Mummy loves Bobby, Throw the ball to Daddy*. Obviously, the child finds it hard or even impossible to understand that the first and the second person pronouns have different referents in different acts of speech. Children sometimes repeat a phrase which is pragmatically appropriate for parents' speech, for instance, speaking about himself, little Lucas says: *My Lucas is hungry*, because a parent says *my Lucas*. Here we deal with existential presupposition, namely *I have a kid called Lucas*, and it certainly refers to the parent. Interestingly, pragmatic deciphering of utterances also comes with age, because a child does not usually understand more than is actually said.

The adults' reference to themselves and the child by a kinship term implies the necessity to designate the roles in the parent-child relations. The use of a nominal phrase instead of a pronoun performs a connotational function as well. A pet name or a term of endearment instead of a pronoun not only brings out the addressee, but shows the addressor's attitude, as for instance, in *Mummy misses her clever little sonny*.

Illeism is to be found in various texts since ancient times. It is known that Julius Caesar used this means in his accounts of wars, presumably detaching himself from the historical figure of Caesar to give the narrative an unbiased tone. Shakespeare's Caesar speaks in the same way:

*Caesar shall forth; the things that threatened me  
Ne'er looked but on my back. When they shall see  
The face of Caesar, they are vanished.*

(Shakespeare, *Seven favourite plays complete*, p.343)

P. Hammond calls this case of illeism 'egoistical confidence' (Hammond, 2009). As a matter of fact, Caesar's reference to himself by his own name shows that he presents himself from outside his *ego*, as a great man with huge authority; hence it is his being an invincible warrior that counts. At the same time, he uses the first person in

*threatened me and my back* where he regards himself as a human being and not a symbol of great power. In *Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies* C. Kahn (2002) remarks that “Even in private, characters speak formally, in lofty abstractions, and refer to themselves in the third person (*illeism*), as though they are spectators and audience of themselves as public figures” (Kahn, 2002)

Let us consider fresher examples:

*Look! Salvador Dali is born. (Dali's memoirs)*

*Dali is immortal and will not die.*

(Zumpalov, 2017)

Obviously, this case of ‘egoistical confidence’ is a reflection of Dali’s well-known narcissistic personality. He looks at himself as a phenomenon, and the nature of mythological Narcissus can be traced here. He is as if in love with his own reflection which exists apart from his personality.

*I am very proud to be from Russell, Kansas, population 5,500. My dad went to work every day for 42 years and [I'm] proud of it, and my mother sold Singer sewing machines to try to make ends meet.*

*Six of us grew up living in a basement apartment. That was **Bob Dole's** early life, and I'm proud of it.*

(Senator Bob Dole, March 14, 1996,  
example borrowed from *Illeism: self-talk*)

By using his name in self-reference, Dole speaks about one aspect of his identity, the public figure. And again, when kinship is mentioned or emotions appear, *I* is used to show the personality side of his self.

The use of a proper name instead of *I* by a grown-up person, being a rhetorical device, detaches the speaker from his personality. In fact, the speaker refers to himself in the way the interlocutor or some third parties would call him, presenting the situation in a non-subjective way. That is why the variant of the name which is normally used by others, often associated with rank and high office (referring to the speaker’s social self) is used for this kind of *illeism*. Therefore, we deal with a substitution along the lines of indication, which in the light of violating the principal feature of this pronoun (*he who says I is I*) leads to pragmatic and stylistics markedness, implying more than is said. By using *illeism*, the speaker talks of himself as of the *other*, at the same time as if quoting someone else’s speech. But the fact that the speaker and the object of speech have the same person as their referents (the same reference with different denotations) makes the hearer perceive this as a rhetorical device.

In the following example the quoting is even more obvious:

*Donald Trump: First of all, nobody respects women more than Donald Trump. I'll tell you. Nobody respects women more. My daughter Ivanka always says, 'Daddy, nobody respects women more than you, Daddy, what are they talking about?'*

*(Krieg, Twelve times Donald Trump declared his respect for women, 2016)*

Presenting himself as a social figure, quoting another person, Trump in reality reacts to what *they are talking about* (as his daughter puts it), in other words, he refers to the public opinion about his public self.

As can be seen, illeism is a means of constructing and producing different identities of oneself. By distancing from the individualized denotation of oneself, the speaker (usually someone who aspires to be a public figure) demonstrates the boundary between his self and the image seen by others, thus 'pretending' to be the *other*. It is obvious that the purely linguistic (semantic and pragmatic) factors reflect a certain psychological state of the illeist, that of distancing oneself from one's *ego*. Interestingly, psychologists have discovered that speaking and writing about oneself in the third person facilitates a person's decision-making process. This phenomenon is described in terms of the so-called 'Solomon's paradox'. According to the legend, after becoming King at the age of 20, in a dream, Solomon asked God for endless wisdom. Wisdom was given to him. It, however, worked paradoxically: while Solomon managed to solve other people's problems, he was unable to handle his own issues. Hence, according to I. Grossman, who did research on investigating people's abilities of making decisions based on the linguistic perspective, "Differences in cognitive processing under different perspectives lead to asymmetries in the performance of wise reasoning about one's own and others' life problems, especially in interpersonal conflict dilemmas involving self-threatening situations (Grossmann, 2017).

The conclusions psychologists have drawn speak of the importance of pronominal perspective. In answer to the question why Solomon's wisdom failed to guide controlling his own life the following cause is suggested: "One reason, is that people tend to adopt the first-person perspective when faced with their personal problems and the third-person perspective when thinking about others' issues" (Grossmann & Kross, 2014).

This interpretation has a direct bearing to the semantic and pragmatic opposition between the first and the third persons. In the first-person perspective the subject and the object of reflection are the same, but when the object of examination is distanced from the speaker (in the case of illeism), reflection becomes less stressful and, in principle, more effective. So it might be concluded that self-distancing by the use of illeism can serve as a psychological device for self-help.



## Conclusion

Language is a powerful means of forming and expressing different perceptions of a person's identity. The expression of selfhood would not be possible without the first person pronoun which indicates the speaker's awareness of his *ego*, as opposed to others. The notion of subjectivity or individualization lies at the core of the meaning of the pronoun *I*. Therefore, the existence of other means to refer to the speaker, as well as the speaker's deliberate self-distancing by the use of third person lexical units are of special interest, both for a linguist and a psychologist. Having examined two patterns which are connected with the speaker's self-reference we come to the following conclusions. In a copulative pattern *I am X*, where *X* stands for another person's name, the other person or phenomenon acquires the quality of subjectivity. Consequently, the speaker expresses empathy and solidarity with the *other* presenting the latter in an individualized way. In the second pattern, which is the use of the third person instead of the first (illeism), the speaker detaches himself from his *ego*, usually presenting his social or public self different from his own inner self. Both uses result in a peculiar psychological presentation of *ego*'s relations with the *other*. Thus, in comparing the construction *I am X* where *X* is another person or phenomenon with illeistic usage we come to the conclusion that two different types of detachment-identification take place. In the first the speaker states being the *other*, the latter becoming individualized. In the second case the speaker implies that he looks at himself from the *other*'s standpoint.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

### Ethical standards

The author affirms this research does not involve human subjects.

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### Ես-ը որպես *ուրիշ*, *ուրիշը* որպես *ես*

#### Մարիկա Տոնյան

Հոդվածը նվիրված է խոսողի ինքնության արտահայտման իմաստաբանական և գործաբանական առանձնահատկություններին: Ինքնության դրսևորումը դիտվում է *ուրիշից* սահմանազատվելու և նրա հետ հարաբերվելու տեսանկյունից: Այդ նպատակով վերլուծության են ենթարկվել երկու տիպի խոսքային կաղապարներ՝ *ես X ես* կառույցը, որտեղ *X*-ը խոսողի անունից տարբերվող *ուրիշի* անուն է և *իլեիզով* պարունակող ասույթը, որում անձը իր մասին խոսում է երրորդ դեմքով: Քննությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ երբ խոսողի ինքնությունը ներկայացնող

կառույցում *ես* դերանունը օգտագործվում է այլ անձի անվան հետ, *ուրիշին* վերագրվում է անհատականացման հատկանիշ: Արդյունքում խոսողը ցուցադրում է, որ ապրումակցում է այդ անունը կրողին և նույնացնում իր և *ուրիշի* ինքնությունները: Իլեիզմի օգտագործման դեպքում խոսողը, ընդհակառակը, դիտավորյալ կերպով ինքն իրենից հեռացնում է անհատականության դրսևորումը և ներկայանում որպես *ուրիշ*, սովորաբար որպես հանրային դեմք: Կատարված ուսումնասիրության արդյունքները թույլ են տալիս նաև բացատրել հոգեբանների այն դիտարկումը, ըստ որի երրորդ դեմքով ինքն իր մասին խոսելու պարագայում անձը կարողանում է ավելի սթափ գնահատել և կառավարել իր հոգեվիճակը:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** *եսակենտրոնություն, իլեիզմ, հղում սեփական եսին, անհատականացում, ինքնություն, հանրային ես-ը:*