CHAPTER 4

On Gender Asymmetry in Slovak Human Nouns

4.1 Lexical gaps in Slovak human nouns

4.1.1 Lexical gaps due to biological constraints

Biological conditions can be the cause of asymmetrical expressions. Predictably, biologically determined female roles and characteristics tend to be grammatically feminine, e.g., šestonediľka (f.) ‘new mother during her post-partum stage’, dojka (f.) ‘wet nurse’, while male roles and evaluations of physical appearance and other characteristics are typically masculine, e.g., bradáč ‘bearded person’, fuzáč ‘person with a moustache’, plešivec (m.) ‘baldy’, holobriadok (m.) ‘shaveling, puppy, whipster’.

Biologically determined asymmetries are relatively rare. Most of them occur in Category 9 “Identity as determined by physical appearance or other physical characteristics”. Some feminine-only or masculine-only metaphoric extensions of one particular person’s behavior might be biologically constrained by that person’s sex. For instance, Xantipa (f.) ‘Xantippe’, originally a female proper name (Xantippe, the wife of Socrates) can only be applied to ill-tempered women, never to men.

4.1.2 Lexical gaps due to social and/or historical constraints

Cultural/societal knowledge and experience also pertain to personal noun formation, and the distribution of grammatical masculinity and femininity (or absence of thereof) can depend not only on the sex of a referent per se, but also on social expectations. Socio-cultural norms within given historical frameworks dictate, for instance, the absence of feminine counterparts of the words below due to the absence of corresponding female referents:
EXAMPLE 12

pytač (m.) ‘the one who asks/proposes marriage’ — *pytačka (f.)
rytier 5 (m.) ‘knight, companion’ — *rytierka 5 (f.)
kúpač (m.) ‘boy or young man in Slovakia, who, following traditional custom, would pour water over the girls on Easter Monday’ — *kúpačka (f.)

The category in which such social constraints are most visible is denotations based on a person’s vocation. Some occupations used to be socially (and, partly, biologically) constrained, particularly in feudal society:

EXAMPLE 13

furman (m.) ‘carter’
valach (m.) ‘chief shepherd’s helper’
kosec (m.) ‘scyther, mower’
baba, babica (f.) ‘midwife’
guvernantka (f.) ‘nurserymaid, governess’
varovkyňa (f.) ‘babysitter’
práčka (f.) ‘washerwoman’

In both urban and rural settings, many other aspects of feudal social life remained male-only domains, including the military protection of centralized power, public security, most of industry and commerce, Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiastical authority. The following are examples of masculine-only denotations in these semantic spheres, which are conceptually related to the male population only:

EXAMPLE 14

hajdúch (m.) ‘heyduck, a mercenary foot soldier in Hungarian Empire; a halberdier of a Hungarian noble’
honvéd (m.) ‘honved, Hungarian soldier during the revolutionary war of 1848-1849’
spovedník (m.) ‘confessor, a priest who hears confessions’ (Catholic or Orthodox, males only)
kňaz (m.) ‘priest’

Several loan words from outside the domestic context illustrate similar tendencies to male
dominance in various social domains, e.g., in religion: *ajatolláh* (m.) ‘ayatollah’, *guru* (m.) ‘guru’, etc.

There seems to be a cross-cultural social agreement on perceiving men through the prism of authority and strength, and women through the optics of the aesthetic. Male bias has existed in evaluating women (and sometimes children), especially with respect to their appearance and behavior. Such bias is palpable in the following negative evaluations:

**EXAMPLE 15**

*prespanka* (f.) ‘single mother, unmarried woman who slept with someone’

*pobehlica* (f.) ‘wanton’

*koketa* (f.), *koketka* (f.) ‘coquette, flirt’

*fiflena* (f.), *frnda* (f.), *frnduľa* (f.) ‘flapper, dressy girl’

*rafika* (f.) ‘deceitful, mendacious woman’

*macocha* (f.) ‘malicious cruel woman, lit. stepmother,’

*tápa* (f.), *tápša* (f.), *kača* (f.) ‘dumb woman, silly goose, judy’

*špata* (f.) ‘unattractive, ugly woman’

Characteristically, no male/masculine counterparts exist in Slovak for the examples above. Moreover, society seems to judge men’s negative behavior more mercifully than women’s; for instance, the sexually loose behavior of men might even carry connotations of achievement.

Naturally, in the course of time, some stereotypical assumptions about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain social roles for men and women can change, a fact that tends to be reflected linguistically in contemporary Slovak. One of the major categories in which male bias has been disappearing is the class of words referring to one’s identity depending on their occupation. Many originally male/masculine-only human nouns have acquired a female/feminine counterpart, e.g., in Modern Slovak *admirál* (m.) ‘admiral’ and *poslanec* (m.) ‘Congressman’ co-exist with *admirálka* (f.) ‘woman admiral’ and *poslankyňa* (f.) ‘Congresswoman’, respectively.

Finally, the discussion of lexical gaps due to social and/or historical constrains should at least briefly mention the notion of “social gender”. Bußmann and Hellinger (2003: 149), following Kramarae and Treichler (1985: 173), claim that social gender is “a non-linguistic category which reflects social and cultural stereotypes of female and male traits, behaviors, and
roles.” Within my classification system, social gender is present in one way or another in most types of asymmetrical relationships, particularly in lexical gaps caused by social and/or historical constraints, but also in the class of paired masculine-feminine designations with a semantic difference, and in epicene nouns such as *hlava (f.) ‘head’. However, the category of social gender seems to operate even within some symmetrical pairs, both established and nascent, and pertains to some aspects of an extra-linguistic reality, such as the size of a class of female referents denoted by a particular feminine noun, as opposed to the size of a group of male referents. In other words, despite the fact that linguistically both grammatical gender forms for a miner (*baník (m.) and *banička (f.)) are well-established in Slovak, predictably, *banička as an extra-linguistic category is less preferred.

4.1.3 Lexical gaps due to formal constraints

4.1.3.1 Diminutives

Attested instances of lexical asymmetry involving diminutives revealed an interesting and unexpected problem: it is evidently impossible to modify the gender of already diminutivized words. An example is given below:

**EXAMPLE 16**

mrzák (m.) – mrzáčka (f.) ‘cripple, dim.’

mrzáčik (m., dim.) – *mrzáčička (f., dim.) ‘cripple, dim.’

Mrzáčka (f.) is clearly derived from mrzák (m.) by attaching the feminizing suffix –ka. However, this rule does not apply to masculine diminutives, which cannot give rise to feminine diminutives; thus *mrzáčička (f., dim.) is not an attested word.

Diminutives present far greater morphological complexities than can be discussed in the framework of my research. The aim of this section is to discuss some cases of diminutive nouns that display lexical asymmetry, in order to highlight the resistance of diminutives to generating opposite-sex counterparts, and to suggest an explanation for this phenomenon.

In Slovak, diminutivization is done by means of suffixation. Diminutive suffixes can
apply to substantival, adjectival, verbal or adverbial bases. The process of attaching diminutive suffixes does not involve any change of word class; that is, both the base word and the diminutive share the same word class characteristics, as illustrated below.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{TABLE 9:} Diminutivization in Slovak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word class</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>dom—domček (dim.) ‘house’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>pekný — peknučký (dim.), peknušký (dim.), peknunký (dim.), peknulinký (dim.) ‘pretty’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>spat—spinkat’ (dim.) ‘to sleep’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>nízko — nizučko (dim.), nizunko (dim.), nizulinko (dim.) ‘low’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inventory of Slovak diminutive suffixes is typically broken down by grammatical gender. Out of all the available resources, I found no scholarly work containing an exhaustive list of Slovak substantival diminutive suffixes. In Dvonč et al. (1966: 80), the following masculine diminutive suffixes are briefly mentioned: -ček -ek, -ik -čik. Horecký (1971: 163-168) lists the following productive diminutive suffixes in Slovak: masculine -ík/-ik, -ok, -ko, -ček/-tek, -ec, -uľko, -enko, -inko, feminine -ka, -ička, -očka/-očka, -enka/-ienka, -inka, -uška, -uľka, and neuter -ko, -ce, -ičko, -iečko/-ečko, -očko/-očko, -iačko, -uško. David Short in Comrie and Corbett (2002: 564) notes that Slovak has “a good repertoire of suffixes based on -k-, -čk-, and -nk-.” Other than the three comments above, no complete list of Slovak diminutive suffixes was found. In addition to the above-mentioned primary suffixes, the inventory of masculine diminutive suffixes in Slovak also includes various secondary suffixes, e.g., -iček, -inček, -ánik, -áčik. The most typical feminine suffix is -ka; others include the secondary suffixes such as -ička, -inka, -ienka, -enka, -očka, -očka, -uška, and tertiary suffixes, e.g., -čička, -činka, -čenka, -ulinka, -ulienka. Neuter diminutives are formed by means of suffixes such as -ko, -atko/-átko, -inko, -enko, -enuško.

Formally, the secondary and tertiary suffixes are iterations of the primary ones. One base

\textsuperscript{29} All examples are from KSSJ.

The lexical asymmetry attested in my corpus pertains to those diminutives which lack opposite gender counterparts completely, even though the base words exist in both genders. In most cases, the missing diminutive forms are feminine.

Compare the following examples:

**EXAMPLE 17**

*vojak* (m.) ‘soldier’ — *vojačka* (f.) ‘woman soldier’
*vojačik* (m., dim.), but */?vojačička, */?vojačočka* (f., dim.)

**EXAMPLE 18**

*žiak* (m.) ‘pupil’ — *žiačka* (f.) ‘female pupil’
*žiačik* (m., dim.) — */?žiačička, */?žiačočka, */?žiačinka* (f., dim.) ‘female pupil’

The masculine nouns *vojak* and *žiak* co-occur with diminutive derivatives, while feminine nouns *vojačka* and *žiačka* lack the respective diminutive forms. The asterix (*) indicates that the words are unattested in the Slovak dictionaries listed in my bibliography, as well as in the SNK; a Google search showed no results either. The question mark (?) represents potential existence (e.g., as a nonce formation). Forms such as */?vojač-ič-ka, */?vojač-oč-ka, */?žiač-ič-ka, */?žiač-oč-ka, */?žiač-in-ka* sound highly unusual and artificial, and would likely be rejected by most speakers of the language. Nevertheless, some of those expressions could potentially be used by me and two other native speakers I consulted informally.

When the concept for a certain type of female person exists (a female soldier, a girl pupil, respectively), and a base noun is at our disposal, too, technically, there should not be any reason preventing formation of the feminine diminutive forms, unless these are isolated exceptions to some kind of derivational rule. However, in my corpus are more examples similar to Examples 17 and 18:
EXAMPLE 19

blondiač (m., dim.) ‘blond, fair-haired male’ — */?blondiačička (f., dim.)
hrbáčik (m., dim.) ‘hunchback’ — */?hrbáčička (f., dim.)
huncúti (m., dim.) ‘rascal’, but */?huncútička (f., dim.)
sedliačik (m., dim.) ‘peasant’, but */?sedliačička, */?sedliačôčka (f., dim.)

From the examples above, it is not clear what the base words of all the unattested (but potential) feminine derivatives would be. One possibility would be that feminine diminutives are derived from masculine diminutives. This assumption would not be illogical at all, particularly given that many scholars claim that, in most cases, feminine nouns are derived from masculine ones. An alternative approach assumes that the relationship between diminutives and their derivational bases is “horizontal” (derivation from base nouns of the same grammatical gender) rather than “vertical” (derivation of one diminutive from another of the opposite grammatical gender).

The “horizontal” approach, in which feminine diminutives are derived from feminine non-diminutives, seems to be a better explanation for my Slovak data than the “vertical” one, in which feminine diminutives are derived from masculine diminutives; cf. the following examples, in which all the forms denote a ‘poor person’:

EXAMPLE 20

chudák (m.) — chudáč (m., dim.)
chudera (f.) — chuderka (f., dim.)
chudina (f.) — chudinka (f., dim.)

Chudák is a diminutive derivative of the base word chudák; both forms are masculine. The feminine forms chuderka and chudinka are clearly not derived from the masculine diminutive form chudáč, but rather from the base feminine nouns chudera and chudina, respectively.

In either case, regardless of the gender of the base word, feminine diminutives are much less robustly attested than the corresponding masculine diminutives.

30 Blondinočka is a well-formed diminutive feminine noun. However, its base noun is different from that of masculine blondiačik.
4.1.3.2 Nouns in –ec

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that the derivational suffix -ec in Slovak masculine nouns seems to act as a major constraint on the probability of feminization. In this study, masculine nouns ending in -ec are attested in most categories, and they typically occur without feminine counterparts, although some sub-classes contain symmetric masculine-feminine pairs. Semantically, virtually all categories in my corpus do or could contain nouns with the final -ec, e.g., kinship terms (súrodenec (m.) ‘sibling’), descriptions relating to behavior (sebec (m.) ‘egoist’, pokrytec (m.) ‘hypocrite’), health (slepec (m.) ‘blind person’), occupation and avocational activities (životopisec (m.) ‘biographer’). Often, human nouns in -ec are expressive/pejorative, e.g., nedomosenec (m.) ‘premature baby; dumb person’, neduživec (m.) ‘person who is weak or sickly in health’.

A vast majority of the masculine nouns in -ec are derived from adjectives (e.g., slepec (m.) ‘blind person’, from slepý ‘blind’) or participles (e.g., odsúdenec (m.) ‘convict’, from odsúdený ‘convicted’), which themselves can be previously derived or non-derived.

The examples above demonstrate that the respective conceptual categories are not intrinsically masculine-only. Nevertheless, Slovak speakers experience difficulty in formulating most feminine variants of the masculine nouns ending in -ec. Often, feminine departicipial or deadjectival substantival forms are avoided altogether, as in (a) below; instead, they are replaced by nominalized participles or adjectives, as in Example 21 (b):

**EXAMPLE 21**

a. porazenec (m.) ‘defeated person’—?porazenkyňa (f.)
b. porazený (m.) ‘defeated person’—porazená (f.)

If a feminine counterpart does exist, either as a nonce word or as an established formation, one of the following three suffixes is used: -kyňa, e.g., športovec (m.)—športovkyňa (f.) ‘athlete’; -ica, e.g., krásavec (m.)—krásavica (f.) ‘good-looker, beauty’; or -ka, e.g., ryšavec (m.)—ryšavka (f.) ‘red-head’. Curiously, one semantic category which exhibits numerous pairs is Category 14 “Descriptions denoting patients/ recipients/beneficiaries of specific actions or activities or persons affected by circumstances”.

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EXAMPLE 22

*osvojenec* (m.)—*osvojenka* (f.) ‘one who is adopted’

*spomocnenec* (m.)—*spomocnenkyňa*[^32] (f.) ‘delegate, commissioner’

*zmocnenec* (m.)—*zmocnenkyňa*[^33] (f.) ‘deputy, agent, assignee, envoy’

All the examples above are derived from prefixed verbal past participles, e.g., *utopenec* (m.) ‘drowned person’ (from *u-top-en-yyyy* ‘drowned’). This type of formation seems to be rather productive.

In sum, it is difficult to explain why many nouns terminating in *-ec* have relatively systematically become fixed as masculine-only nouns, when complex linguistic tools are available for forming feminine terms to denote female referents.

4.1.3.3 Deverbal conversions

Another class of nouns that are masculine-only is deverbal conversions:

EXAMPLE 23

*zjav* (m.) ‘figure’ (*zjavuť sa* ‘to appear, occur’)

*zbeh* (m.) ‘deserter’ (*zbehnuť* ‘to desert’)

*zved* (m.) ‘spy’ (*zvedieť* ‘to spy, learn something’)

Such conversions do not seem to permit feminization, despite the fact that the necessary linguistic means are potentially available in the morphological system.

4.2 Parallel designations for women and men in Slovak, with a semantic difference

Paired lexical items can have two interpretations, depending on whether the referent is a male or female person. Some masculine-feminine pairs are unexpectedly asymmetrical, e.g.,

[^32]: PSP
rodič (m.) - rodička (f.), where a masculine epicene ‘parent’ is the morphological base of a feminine-only noun that has exclusively female referents, ‘woman in labor’. Despite the universality of the social and familial role of the female parent, in Slovak no term indicates a female parent.

Sometimes there is a difference in the social status of a man and a woman having, seemingly, the same job. For example, sekretár (m.) characteristically refers to the head of an administrative governmental department, while sekretárka denotes a personal assistant who performs clerical tasks for a boss or an organization. Similarly, gazdina (f.) signifies a ‘housekeeper’, while gazda (m.) denotes a ‘householder’, ‘manager’, or ‘administrator of an estate’.

In the area of the spiritual and the supernatural, masculine terms tend to be strictly associated with Christian religion and life, while the feminine counterparts can relate to sorcery, black magic, and astrology. For example, klerik (m.) is a seminarist preparing to become a priest, while klerička (f.) is female member of the “cleric” character class in role-playing video games. Kňaz (m.) is a ‘priest’ or ‘clergyman’ in Christian churches, while kňažka (f.) is a ‘priestess’ in the pagan sense.

Metaphorical extensions can exhibit asymmetry, too. For instance, the origin of the asymmetrical relationship between boh (m.) ‘god (highest authority, idol)’ and bohyňa (f.) ‘goddess (beautiful, attractive, majestic and gracious woman)’ seems to be derived from the stereotypical description of a woman as a sexual, physical, and aesthetically pleasing being, and man as a symbol of power, authority and respect.

Even metaphorically used names of animals typically reflect the opposition between power, dominance, authority, aggression on one hand and weakness, playfulness, or stupidity on the other hand, e.g. býk ‘brute, strong and/or rude male [lit. bull]’ vs. krava ‘dumb woman [lit. cow]’.

4.3 Epicene nouns in Slovak

Epicene nouns do not constitute true lexical gaps, because they can refer to both sexes, though only one grammatical gender is used. Epicenes are widely represented in my corpus. The
only two semantic spheres in which epicene nouns are absent are Category 7 “Identity based on membership in or adherence to an organization” and Category 8 “Identity as defined by adherence to an ideology”. On the other hand, all the nouns in Category 1A “General terms for human beings/ Generic sex-unspecified” are, by definition, epicenes.

Frequently, nouns with pejorative or expressive load can refer to people of both sexes while maintaining only one gender paradigm, e.g., chmul' (m.), chruľo (m.) ‘idiot, dumb or primitive person’, jašo (m.), šal'o (m.) ‘crackpot, featherbrain’, rojko (m.) ‘daydreamer, idealist’, cintľavka (f.) ‘emotionalist’, ohava (f.) ‘nasty person, monster’, maškara (f.) ‘scarecrow’, štangľa (f.) ‘lanky person’, hebedo (n.) ‘clumsy and fat person’, človeča (n.) ‘person of small size’.

The category of epicenes also includes several animal names used for people on the basis of physical resemblance or analogical behavior: býk (m.) ‘strong and rude person [lit. bull]’, chrt (m.) ‘gaunt person [lit. greyhound]’, chrúst (m.) ‘fragile, weak person [lit. maybeetle]’, škrečok ‘scrooge, hoarder [lit. hamster]’, bažant (m.) ‘beginner, inexperienced person [lit. pheasant]’, zajac (m.) ‘young, inexperienced person [lit. hare, rabbit]’, mačička (f.) ‘darling, a clingy, playful person (typically child or woman) [lit. kitty]’.

Some originally non-personal words, both concrete and abstract, can be used for humans, e.g., hlava (f.) ‘head’, mozog (m.) ‘brain’, ucho (n.) ‘greenhorn [lit. ear]’, drevo (n.) ‘clumsy person [lit. wood, lumber]’, štruktúra (f.) ‘structure’ (used as a pejorative noun to refer to a hard-core Communist collaborator, official, or dignitary), šarža (f.) ‘rank’, autorita (f.) ‘authority’, kapacita (f.) ‘mastermind’, megahviezda (f.) ‘mega-star’, stálica (f.) ‘fixed star’. Among these lexemes are honorific titles derived from abstract nouns, which are used to refer equally to men and women of a high social standing: jasnost’ (f.), výsost’ (f.) ‘highness’, ctihodnost’ (f.) ‘respectability, venerability’.

4.4 Double-gender nouns in Slovak

In this study, I conclude that two-gendered personal nouns are non-existent in Slovak. In Czech, there are at least two major classes of what are generally considered double gender personal nouns: pejorative/expressive nouns in –a and personal nouns in –í derived from verbs and nominalized adjectives (Example 24).
EXAMPLE 24

a. Pejorative/expressive nouns in –a (Examples are from Dickins, 2001)

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{neposedá} & \text{‘fidget’} \\
\text{ohavá} & \text{‘monster’}
\end{array}\]

b. Personal nouns in –í derived from verbs and nominalized adjectives (examples from Čmejrková (2003) and Dickins (2001))

\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{rukojmi} & \text{‘hostage’}
\end{array}\]

Slovak avoids double gender nouns like those above by consistently assigning only one grammatical gender to each referent. For example, while Czech \textit{ohavá} ‘monster’ can be masculine or feminine, the Slovak equivalent \textit{ohava} is a feminine-only epicene. Alternatively, Slovak can add gender-differentiating suffixes; thus, corresponding to Czech \textit{neposedá} ‘fidget’ (m./f.), Slovak has two separate lexemes, masculine \textit{neposedník} and feminine \textit{neposednica}.