

IT'S I, IT'S ME: A CASE FOR SYNTAX

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0.0. *The problem*

The question whether it is correct to say *it's me* or whether one has to change to *it's I* has played a prominent role in prescriptive grammars of English. The reasons for the prescriptivist's insistence on the exclusive and sole correctness of *it's I* have been discussed in various places¹, and I will review two of the arguments put forth for its justification. One argument rests on the assumption that the personal pronouns of English are morphologically marked for two cases variously labelled

nominative and *accusative*

or

subjective and *objective case*.

I	he	she	we	they	<i>nominative/subjective case</i>
me	him	her	us	them	<i>accusative/objective case</i>

There can be no doubt that, historically speaking, the morphological difference is a difference of case forms. The prescriptivist's assumption is that the desinential characterization of the two series of pronouns has stayed the same from Old to Modern English, and that it is valid for contemporary English as well. I will question this view and try to show that it is no longer possible to characterize a pronoun as *nominative* or *accusative* in isolation from its function in a sentence.

Since the *nominative* has historically been the case form of the subject, and *accusative* that of the (direct) object, the prescriptivist sees his position

¹ See for example Quirk (1962: chapter 7 and supplement II), Palmer (1971: 14–17), Allen (1972: 56–59).

justified in maintaining that a pronoun that functions as subject should be in the subjective case, and one that functions as object be in the objective case. This second argument is strengthened by the Classical languages, which show case concord between the subject and predicate (pro)nouns in copulative sentences. If Latin follows this line of reason, English should follow suit. In contrast, it has been pointed out by descriptive grammarians that a foreign language cannot serve as the model of one's own and that a grammar of English should be based on the facts of the English language as it is written or spoken today.

The material for the observations and conclusions proposed below has come from some forty novels by British authors originally published between 1930 and 1970. It proved useful to include other constructions such as clauses of comparison and equative sentences to round off the picture. I will start off with some constructions which display the objective case form of the personal pronoun in subject position. These are dealt with in the first three sections.

1.0 Elliptical constructions

The personal pronouns *me*, *him*, *her*, *us* and *them* occur frequently in utterances that only consist of the pronoun or in elliptical constructions without a finite verb form. They cannot be said to be in the objective case.

'Tired?' 'Not me.' (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 25)

Yes, I know. And me too. (Lessing, *The four-gated city*: 603)

'Why couldn't he be my age, or me his?' (Fowles, *The collector*: 193)

'Where has he gone?' Dinah raised apathetically enquiring eyes. 'Him, Rob.' (Lohmann, *The echoing grove*: 195)

'There was another one. Him.' (Golding, *Lord of the flies*: 94)

(Mrs. Apo leads the singing). 'Her again,' said Divine Discontent. (Waugh, *Vile bodies*: 22)

'Isn't that a pretty girl!' Henry exclaimed...

'Who?' Willy looked round.

'The little Carter.'

'Oh her. Yes, of course.' (Johnson, *Catherine Carter*: 143)

I said that I wished she had been present at the party. 'Oh, us', she said laughing again, as if any such eventuality were utterly unthinkable. 'Besides, we were away.' (Powell, *A buyer's market*: 203)

'Who's to stop it — us?' (Lessing, *The golden note-book*: 172)

Who is right? Me or they? (Johnson, *Catherine Carter*: 39)

She: Oh! Me: That's just what you are. She: You're just hard and mean. Me: Who's mean? What do you think you said to me last night, wasn't that mean enough?

She: That's what you get for not minding your own business. Me: You are my business. She: I'm not ... (Sansom, *The cautious heart*: 137)

There was no example for the third person plural in the corpus. Postposed pronouns display the same characteristic.

Nobody thought much of him, only me. (Johnson, *Catherine Carter*: 102)

'Your son stole it, not me.' (Sillitoe, *A tree on fire*: 233)

Pronouns that stand in apposition to a following sentence behave similarly. This again is most frequent for the first person singular.

'Me, I have never liked Prime Ministers.' (Waugh, *Vile bodies*: 40)

Me, I couldn't care less if the world did blow up tomorrow, as long as I'm blown up with it. (Sillitoe, *Saturday night and Sunday morning*: 34)

The same can be observed with personal pronouns in subject position post-modified by a relative or prepositional phrase.

Me that's led such a quiet life! (Wain, *Hurry on down*: 101)

We sat in the pub, she at tomato juice and me with a brown ale. (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 151)

Elliptical questions are no exception to the use of *me*, *him*, etc., observed thus far.

'Why me? Isn't there anyone else?' (Golding, *The spire*: 19)

Why by all means, Mr. Louit, me, if you insist, but you too, said Mr. de Baker. (Beckett, *Watt*: 183)

These elliptical constructions contrast with *wh*-questions that contain a finite form of the copula. Pronouns in their objective case forms do not occur.

(1) Where is he?

(2) *Where is him?

(3) Who is she?

(4) *Who is her?

To give some illustrations.

'Mrs... What is she?' (Bowen, *The house in Paris*: 51)

'How is she?' (Hartley, *Eustace and Hilda*: 305)

'Where is he?' roared the General. (Waugh, *Vile bodies*: 90)

'But who is she?' (Amis, *Take a girl like you*: 276)

The personal pronouns *me*, *him*, etc., only occur in metalinguistic *wh*-questions.

'It's me,' I said. 'Who's me?' he growled. (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 48)

2.0 Co-ordinated nominal phrases

Co-ordinated nominal phrases are another area where the personal pronouns *me*, *him*, *her*, *us* and *them* show up in subject position and cannot be said to represent the objective case. It is striking that in formal Standard they occur as the non-initial member of a co-ordination.

- (5) She and him went to the bookshop.
 (6) John, Mary and me took a walk.
 (7) ?Her and I could not get to the station.
 (8) ?Us and them met today.

This again is well attested for the first person singular with some examples for the other pronouns. 'Us and them' often has a feature of 'opposed groups' associated with it as contrasted, say, with 'we and them', e.g., *Us and them have our differences*.

- Jack Winter and me's like that. (Wilson, *Hemlock and after*: 140)
 'Mr. Jeavons and me are on the same warden-post', he said. (Powell, *The soldier's art*: 157)
 'On top, when Roger and me went on — he stayed back.' (Golding, *Lord of the flies*: 139)
 It said you and him were unofficially engaged, I said. (Fowles, *The collector*: 85)

The same holds for plural pronouns which are so to speak explained by an apposed co-ordinated nominal phrase.

- 'So you think we could be happy, Robert and me?' (Cary, *To be a pilgrim*: 52)
 'We met in a pub, Jane Shane and me.' (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 97)

The personal pronoun *me*, *him*, etc., in initial position in a coordinated nominal phrase, is restricted to casual, relaxed speech or is a characteristic of substandard English. This characteristic is used, for example, in the speech of Piggy in *Lord of the flies* and in the futuristic teenage slang of *A clockwork orange*.

- 'I told you we were all going to dine here, me, and Hughie and the Dexters. (Mitford, *The blessing*: 116)
 This is just a friendly letter and I am not threatening you, but you just do as I say else me and some of my pals from the Works will be up your way... (Amis, *Lucky Jim*: 153)
 'Me and my hunters, we're living along the beach by a flat rock.' (Golding, *Lord of the flies*: 155)
 'Not since me and Fred's grown-up.' (Sillitoe, *Saturday night and Sunday morning*: 64)

The same stylistic and social differences are involved in the case of simple *me*, *him*, etc., as pronoun forms in subject position.

- 'Mo stand on Dim's pletchos. Open that window and me enter, droogies.' (Burgess, *A clockwork orange*: 49)

3.0 Non-finite noun clauses

The personal pronouns *me*, *him*, etc., are frequent in non-finite noun clauses, such as gerundial, infinitival or participial constructions. They cannot be said to represent the objective case form in the majority of cases. Some may

be explained as being dependent on a transitive verb or a preposition, but there are many more examples which do not function in this way.

In the following sentences, the objective case form of the pronoun can be interpreted as being dependent on a transitive verb or a preposition.

- That's what you always wanted, me going out to work every morning and bringing money in on Friday night. (Sillitoe, *A tree on fire*: 46)
 I liked the moral tone she was taking, because she'd be a safeguard against me having more than one drink. (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 116)

In more formal contexts, the objective case forms can be substituted by possessives, e.g. ... *my going out* ..., *my having more than one drink*. There is abundant evidence of *me*, *him*, etc., in non-finite noun clauses in subject position.

- 'Oh — me to come asking him for death and him to give me back my life instead.' (Lehmann, *The echoing grove*: 319)
 Even I thought it was a joke at first, him liking me for the smell. (Sansom, *The cautious heart*: 150)
 He must have heard about it somehow and felt he simply had to arrange to turn up, him and me being such chums and about to become partners in crime. (Amis, *Take a girl like you*: 294)
 It kept on coming back, me standing and lying there with no clothes on. (Fowles, *The collector*: 102)

4.0 Clauses of comparison²

Sentences like (10) and (12) have been banned from literary English by prescriptivists, although they do frequently occur.

- (9) John is older than she.
 (10) John is older than her.
 (11) Mary is as clever as he.
 (12) Mary is as clever as him.

The examples attested divide fairly neatly into a class with subjective and into a group with objective case forms. In the case of *as ... as ...*, nine sentences show the subjective, and eleven the objective case form, while the ratio is slightly reversed for *more ... than ...* where forty-one examples display *I*, *he*, etc., and thirty-seven the pronouns *me*, *him*, etc., after the particle.

- 'When you're as old as me you begin to lose your identity'. (Murdoch, *Flight from the enchanter*: 115)
 'He cannot breathe the same air as she'. (Waugh, *Brideshead revisited*: 99)
 'I am not as old as she to whom the Abbé referred'. (Powell, *The kindly ones*: 199)

² For a summary of this topic in prescriptive grammars see Mittins et al. (1970 item 21).

- 'I'm sure they have as much courage as us'. (Sillitoe, *The general*: 73)
 'If you can do more than I, bc it so'. (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 119)
 'Is Ben less fortunate than me?' (Waugh, *A handful of dust*: 23)
 Then a little dark woman came in too, older than he, but very pretty and lively.
 (Cary: *Herself surprised*: 119)
 'We keep forgetting that George is older than us ...' (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 129)
 I lameducked her just to show the Vestal Virgins that I was cleverer than they.
 (Fowles, *The collector*: 228)

There are several factors involved that favour one form over another in clauses of comparison. The most clearcut is the difference between spoken and written English with *me*, *him*, etc., occurring almost exclusively in spoken or quasi-spoken discourse. Matters of style are another factor. The subjective case forms are used in polished, formal styles of speech and writing. A third factor has to do with the predicate. The personal pronouns *I*, *he*, etc., are more frequent after intransitive or transitive verbs while the objective forms are preferred following predicate nouns and adjectives.

4.1 Substitute constructions

There are two substitute constructions available to the speaker of English to avoid the controversy involving sentences like (10) and (12). He can use a pro-form of the predicate after the pronoun.

- 'I feel as if no one in the world was as important as I am'. (Hartley, *Eustace and Hilda*: 262)
 'Miss Grundtvig swims much better than I do', said Eustace. (Hartley, *Eustace and Hilda*: 167)
 It was rather comic really, because I was a good six inches taller than he was.
 (Maugham, *The razor's edge*: 56)
 And no one else I've met has them as he has. (Fowles, *The collector*: 218)

The second possibility consists of replacing the personal pronoun by the pronoun of identity, which has only one form, i.e., *myself*, *himself*, etc. So the controversy does not arise. There are some striking examples to be found for this tendency in the two editions of *The golden notebook* by Doris Lessing. The following sentence pair is taken from the first and second editions respectively.

- ... [he] had had the same experience as she.
 (Lessing, *The golden notebook*¹: 203)
 ... [he] had had the same experience as herself.
 (Lessing, *The golden notebook*²: 210)

A similar replacement can be found in some focussed *it* constructions to be discussed below.

- And yet several times she found herself stiffening in resentment, as if it were she who was being criticized ... (Lessing, *The golden notebook*¹: 196)
 And yet several times she found herself stiffening in resentment, as if it was herself who was being criticized ... (Lessing, *The golden notebook*²: 204)

4.2 Ambiguous constructions

It has been observed that the change from subjective to objective case forms in clauses of comparison can involve a difference of meaning.

(13) John liked his brother more than she.

(14) John liked his brother more than her.

While (13) contains two subjects (*John*, *she*) and one object of liking (*his brother*), sentence (14) is said to have two objects (*his brother*, *her*) and only one subject (*John*). The two sentences are thus elliptical constructions of the following two:

(15) John liked his brother more than she liked his brother.

(16) John liked his brother more than he (=John) liked her.

(14) can moreover be a variant of (13) in informal English.

The principle displayed by (13) and (14) is important for the variation between *I/me*, *he/him*, etc., in general. It clearly shows that the alternation is controlled by the syntactic co-text. It will be observed that the examples adduced so far for the variation between *I/me*, etc., all involved one-place predicates, i.e., copulative or intransitive verbs.

Ambiguous constructions like (14) are not frequent in discourse, since most of the sentences are automatically disambiguated by their linguistic or situative context. To give a few examples:

- 'Was she nice? Did you -- like her as much as me?' (Wain, *Hurry on down*: 187)
 'Nobody loves it more than me,' Handley said, 'but I don't like it very much.'
 (Sillitoe, *A tree on fire*: 279)

The context makes it clear that *me* has to be taken as being syntactically in object position in the first illustration, while it can only be understood as a variant of *I* in the second example.

Only in rare cases does the author resort to explicit constructions such as (16).

- 'You liked Rozzie better than you did me'. (Cary, *The horse's mouth*: 323)

In the following cases, the objective case forms of the pronoun are required by the object function imposed by the verb.

- It's a pity Ivor had to leave, I hope we'll get someone as nice as him again...
 (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 525)
 'Dear, you must find someone better than me to play with you'. (Johnson, *Catherine Carter*: 212)

5.0 Equative sentences

Sentences containing the copula or a copulative verb like *become* strongly favour the objective case form of the personal pronouns in predicate position. Of the fifty-seven examples involving *be* only three show the subjective case form *I*, *he*, etc. There are several patterns of equative sentences to be considered in this connection. A first construction involves a demonstrative in subject position:

I say to myself: I am Anna Wulf, this is me, Anna, and I'm happy. (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 298)

'That's me'. (Isherwood, *Prater violet*: 7)

'D'you suppose that's him again?' (Waugh, *A handful of dust*: 67)

'That's her', I said. (Cary, *The horse's mouth*: 369)

'I knew that would be us'. (Bowen, *The house in Paris*: 60)

'That's them', said Piggy. 'They blinded me'. (Golding, *Lord of the flies*: 187)

A second pattern has a nominal expression preceding the copula:

'The issue's me, you, real life, happiness'. (Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*: 61)

There's only us, not life. (Sillitoe, *A start in life*: 282)

A subjective case form is found in this pattern:

The sensations, the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable, of imminent harmony, when all outside him will be he ... (Beckett, *Watt*: 39)

A third pattern equates two pronouns:

I'm me and nobody else ... (Sillitoe, *Saturday night and Sunday morning*: 120)

I was also him, wondering how long I could hold out. (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 575)

... the Duke used to carry on long and intimate conversations with me, thinking that I was her. (Waugh, *Brideshead revisited*: 58)

I can choose to be them or not. (Lessing, *The four-gated city*: 567)

The two remaining subjective case forms are found in this last pattern:

'I am I, Saul Green, I am what I am.' (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 565)

He is he, but not his, hers. (Bowen, *The house in Paris*: 229)

Sentences with the copulative verb *become* all display the objective case form. There are six examples conforming to the patterns two and three.

When he was warned, I put myself back to sleep, and instantly I was the old man, the old man had become me ... (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 544)

I became him. (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 572)

... I wanted to become her. (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 567)

For even if the Galls and the piano were long posterior to the phenomena destined to become them, Watt was obliged to think ... (Beckett, *Watt*: 76)

6.0 Focussed constructions³

Equative sentences with *it* for their subject have been the favourite construction in the debate over whether one has to use *it's I* instead of *it's me*. Again it is striking that the controversy has revolved around the predicate position of the pronoun, thereby disregarding the wider grammatical context, which is decisive for the distribution of *I* and *me*. There are two types of *it* constructions of interest to the present discussion. The first can be subsumed under the equative sentence type exemplified in the preceding section. The second is a focussing construction, which pulls a noun phrase (in subject or object position) out of a simple sentence and puts it into the centre of interest.

(17) John bought a book.

(18) It was John who bought a book.

(19) It was a book that John bought.

(18) and (19) are focussed constructions of the simple sentence (17) with (18) putting the subject *John* and (19) the object *a book* into prominence.

These two types of equative *it* sentences have to be distinguished in the debate over *it's I* and *it's me*.⁴

Let us begin with the first type, which goes with the equative sentences of the preceding section. The pattern of distribution is about the same. Of the seventy-three examples sixty-six show the objective case form, and only seven display the subjective.

'It's me,' Gerry's voice continued. (Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*: 227)

'I didn't know it was him till I saw his picture.' (Greene, *Brighton rock*: 79)

'As you say, it was him or her.' (Greene, *Brighton rock*: 246)

'What I mean is ... maybe it's only us.' (Golding, *Lord of the flies*: 97)

'Of course, it's not them really.' (Waugh, *Vile bodies*: 145)

The subjective case form is preferably used in sentences where the pronoun in predicate position is marked as the subject in a preceding or following sentence.

'It's only you and I now, dear ...' (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 121)

'... if anybody deserves one it is he'. (Mitford, *The blessing*: 176)

If anyone was responsible for Brian's death, it was she. (Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*: 378)

The distribution of *I* and *me* is different in focussed *it* constructions. It should be noted that in some instances the pronoun can alter between its

³ I have taken the term from Schachter (1973). "Cleft sentence" is also a widely used term for this type of construction. Jespersen (1949: §§ 6.2.5, 6.7.5-6.7.12) deals with the phenomenon under the label of "relative attraction".

⁴ See Mittins et al. (1970: item 43) for a presentation of prescriptive views on this topic.

subjective and objective case form, as, for example, in sentences (20) to (23), while the objective is seldom changed in (24).

- (20) It's I who asked him.
 (21) It's me who asked him.
 (22) It's I who(m) he asked.
 (23) It's me who(m) he asked.
 (24) It's me he asked.
 (25)? It's I he asked.

It is apparent that in (20) and (21) the pronoun *I* appears in subject position. The two sentences are focussed versions of (26).

- (26) I asked him.

When the pronoun of a focussed *it* construction functions syntactically as the subject of the following relative clause, it can occur in its subjective or objective case form since the relative clause unambiguously determines its syntactic function. Of the 119 attested examples, ninety-nine have a subjective and twenty an objective case form, i.e., the case form of the pronoun in the *it* construction tends to be influenced by the syntactic function the pronoun contracts in the out-of-focus clause.

- ... if only it was I that was dead ... (Waugh, *A handful of dust*: 115)
 It was he who fussed and fumed ... (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 139)
 ... it was she finally who touched his arm. (Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*: 122)
 It was we who had driven twenty-four miles. (Orwell, *Animal farm*: 24)
 They it is who turn into the essential public-school 'old boys'. (Priestley, *Angel pavement*: 46)

Objective case forms occur in only about a sixth of the attested cases.

- 'It should be me that has changed, but I stay the same'. (Bowen, *The house in Paris*: 222)
 'It was him who telephoned?' (Lehmann, *The echoing grove*: 314)

The subjective case form is also attested for all pronominal subjects of passive clauses.

- 'It is I who am humiliated by it'. (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 133)
 It was he this time who was being warned... (Greene, *Brighton rock*: 51)
 And for a moment it seemed to her as if it was they who were about to be put down. (Murdoch, *Flight from the enchanter*: 248)

In sentences (22) to (24), on the other hand, the personal pronouns are marked as objects by the following out-of-focus clause. All three are focussed versions of a sentence like (27)

- (27) He asked me.

It is striking that of the 24 examples, only four display the subjective case form in the focussed clause. This is a reversal of the proportion attested for extracted subject pronouns, and it underlines the tendency observed

earlier that the distribution of *I* and *me* is co-determined by their syntactic function.

There are only two examples for a sentence like (23).

- 'My dear fellow', said Mackenzie, 'it's not me whom you should ask for all this'. (Forester, *The general*: 74)
 It was me that Blackshirt insisted on taking to the police station in Florence, not you. (Powell, *Casanova's Chinese restaurant*: 118)

Subjective pronoun forms followed by *who(m)* in the relative clause are found in two cases.

- 'Yes, it is they whom she is coming to see'. (Compton-Burnett, *The present and the past*: 31)
 Perhaps, indeed, Dorothy was the one who had most to be considered, for it was no doubt she whom the affair was making suffer the most. (Fuller, *The father's comedy*: 165)

In the majority of cases, the pronoun in the focussed *it* construction occurs in the objective form with the relative pronoun omitted. There are two classes of verbs involved, i.e., either simple transitive verbs like *see* or *want* or complex prepositional predicates like *care for* or *worry about*. We will illustrate the simple two-place predicates first, of which there are 11 examples, all displaying the pronoun in its objective case form.

- Now it was me she addressed. (Powell, *The military philosophers*: 217)
 It's not her I want to marry. (Waugh, *Brideshead revisited*: 169)
 'I wish it had been me you saw', Reggie said. (Braine, *Room at the top*: 112)
 It's not him I want here. (Lehmann, *The echoing grove*: 204)

Within the group of complex prepositional predicates, nine examples occur with the pronoun in objective case form in the focussed clause.

- It was bound to be you, not me ... he fell in love with ... (Lehmann, *The echoing grove*: 300)
 It's her I feel sorry for. (Powell, *The kindly ones*: 45)
 I say it with all respect, but if it had been me you'd given it to you'd have to answer. (Burgess, *A clockwork orange*: 26)
 It's him I want to talk to. (Lessing, *The golden notebook*: 138)
 It's not me you think of, but what you feel about me. (Fowles, *The collector*: 242)
 'It's not him I'm worried about'.
 'It's her I'm worried about'. (Greene, *Brighton Rock*: 204)

Two examples display the subjective case form of the pronoun in the focussed clause.

- 'But as I told you, Catherine wishes it, and it is she you are so concerned for'. (Compton-Burnett, *The present and the past*: 76)
 'It was strange she should have told him not to be afraid of Frank because it was she Harold had always been afraid of'. (Updike, *Couples*: 134)

The data allows two conclusions. In focussed *it* constructions, the syntactic function has to be determined either in the focussed or out-of-focus clause. A double marking is either grammatically required as in the case of subject pronouns, or is rare, as in the case of object pronouns. There is, furthermore, a tendency to signal the syntactic function of the pronoun as early as possible, i.e., in the extracted *it* construction. This is suggested by the majority of subjective case forms in those examples displaying pronouns in subject function and by the wide margin of objective case forms for pronouns functioning syntactically as objects.

6.1 Subject-verb agreement in out-of-focus clauses

The copula in the focussed *it* clause always agrees with its pro-form.

(28) It is the boy who broke the window.

(29) It is the boys who broke the window.

In German for example the concord is mediated by the postposed lexical noun.

(30) Es war der Junge, der das Fenster eingeworfen hat.

(31) Es waren die Jungen, die das Fenster eingeworfen haben.

The finite verb form in the out-of-focus clause normally agrees with the relative pro-form of the focussed noun in number, but not in person.

(32) It is I who is in for a surprise.

(33) It is they who are in for a surprise.

There are some rare examples to the contrary where the finite verb form agrees with its extracted noun both in number and person. This is found in ten of the 141 attested cases. It is a feature of polished, formal English.

'It is I who am having to do with material things' ... (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 131)

So you see it isn't only I who miss you. (Hartley, *Eustace and Hilda*: 250)

It's I who decide what happens now. (Murdoch, *Flight from the enchanter*: 16)

'It's you who remember ...' (Bowen, *The house in Paris*: 223)

'It's you who are divorced ...' (Spark, *The Mandelbaum gate*: 18)

It's you who are a little tipsy, my boy. (Powell, *Books to furnish a room*: 232)

This type of agreement is also found in relative clauses.

Such a lot of love and learning confronting poor me, who am so eager to lap it all in comfort. (Compton-Burnett, *More women than men*: 74)

But it is providential that you who are also another kind of victim, should come here. (Burgess, *A clockwork orange*: 121)

7.0 Summary

It has become apparent that the distribution of *I* and *me* in constructions like *it's I* and *it's me* is also a matter of the syntactic function the pronoun contracts in a sentence. If the personal pronoun appears in an object position

it is preferably realised by *me*, *him*, *her*, *us* and *them*. If, however, the personal pronoun shows up in a subject (complement) position, it can vary between what has been called its subjective and objective form. It is no longer possible in contemporary English to speak of the two series of pronouns as being *nominative* and *accusative* solely on the evidence of their form. The pronominal system has changed from a morphologically to a syntactically determined subsystem. Formally, the two series of pronouns of present-day English can be described as distinguishing an unmarked from a marked series, with *I*, *he*, *she*, *we* and *they* representing the latter. This change has resulted in an obliteration of the formal difference in some varieties of Black English and sub-standard English.

CORPUS NOVELS

The novels that have served as the basis of the data for the present article are listed alphabetically by their authors with the original date of publication in parentheses. The editions used are given after the title.

Amis, K. (1954). *Lucky Jim*. 1967. Penguin Books.

Amis, K. (1960). *Take a girl like you*. 1970. Penguin Books.

Beckett, S. (1953). *Watt*. 1963. Calder Jupiter Book.

Bowen, E. (1936). *The house in Paris*. The Albatross Modern Continental Library, vol. 299.

Burgess, A. (1962). *A clockwork orange*. 1972. Penguin Books.

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