

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE VOWS AT THE
CLAUSE LEVEL

Linguistic analysis of texts is a many-sided process. The analyses of words, clauses and clause combinations make the different levels of text analysis. The level of words supposes choice of vocabulary, semantic relations between them, collocations, metaphorical uses of words. The level of clauses assume simple sentences, their grammar and semantics including categories like voice, mood, modality, and transitivity. The linking of clauses in complex or compound sentences makes the level of clauses combination (Chouliaraki L., Fairclough N., 1999; Fairclough N., 1992; Fairclough N., 1995; Fairclough N., Wodak R., 1997; Wodak R., 1996).

This paper will solely focus on the analysis of marriage vows at the levels of clauses and clause combinations.

Any kind of discourse is of interest from the point of view of clauses in it. The speech uttered by a groom or bride is of no less interest or importance from this viewpoint. And what is more, the use of this or that type of clause presupposes the pledgor's future ideas and intentions concerning his/her partner and their marital life. Simple sentences, compared with compound and complex ones, are few in number in the discourse of marriage vows. Both the frequent use of complex and compound sentences and the non-frequent use of simple sentences are logically argued. Every male, when it is time he thought over his marriage vow, would sooner explain why he takes her to be his wife, or how they are going to lead their life together, where and up to when. And the clauses, forming a marriage vow are answers to what, where, when, how and why questions. Accordingly, complex sentences, with adverbial clauses of time, object, place or purpose appear, whereas the simple sentence cannot comprise all this. Let us take three various traditional and non-traditional samples of marriage vow and survey the types of clauses, the linking of clauses in complex and compound sentences. A traditional marriage vow goes like this.

1. *"In the name of God, I, name, take you, name, to be my husband/wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow."*

From the first glance at the marriage vow sample presented above any reader is likely to understand that the first sentence is a simple extended sentence. Little by little reading it up to the end we come to the conjunction *until*, which proves the opposite. The subordinating conjunction *until* converts the so-seemed simple sentence into a complex one forming an adverbial clause of time.

The use of this kind of sentence is thought over beforehand by the speaker. He/she promises eternal love and cherish emphasizing his/her idea in the form of the adverbial clause of time 'until we are parted by death'. After having elaborated his idea,

the speaker just needs to state that the above-mentioned words make his vow solemn. That is why, ending the vow with the simple sentence '*This is my solemn vow*' is quite logical, as it needs no more going in-depth.

2. "*I love you, - , and I know that God has ordained this love. Because of this I desire to be your husband. Together we will be vessels for His service in accordance with His plan, so that in all areas of our life Christ will have the pre-eminence. Through the pressures of the present and the uncertainties of the future, I promise to be faithful to you. I promise to love, guide, and protect you as Christ does His Church, and as long as we both are alive. According to Ephesians 5 and with His enabling power, I promise to endeavor to show to you the same kind of love as Christ showed the Church when He died for her, and to love you as a part of myself because in His sight we shall be one*".

If example 1 just consisted of two sentences, example 2 is a six-sentence marriage vow. It is uttered by a male and is rich in types of sentences; be it simple, compound, complex or compound-complex. The very first sentence of the sample is a compound-complex one. Two clauses are coordinated with each other by the coordinating conjunction *and*. The second clause, in its turn, has a subordinate clause linked to the primary clause by the subordinating conjunction *that*. This secondary or subordinate clause is an adverbial clause of object. It states what the male knows, '*...that God has ordained this love*'. The use of *so that* subordinating conjunction arouses the adverbial clause of purpose to state the purpose of '*being vessels for this service in accordance with His plan*'. The adverbial clauses of comparison, linked by conjunction *as*, and adverbial clause of time, linked by conjunction *as long as*, form a complex sentence. The implications of both conjunctions are significant. The male's comparison of love, guide and protection with the Christ's is sure to have its impressive impact on the female, and the eternity of his intentions is outlined in the adverbial clause of time starting with *as long as*. In the very last compound-complex sentence three adverbial clauses are present; clauses of cause, comparison and time linked by subordinating conjunctions *when*, *as* and *because*. If in an ordinary context the adverbial clause of time may just denote the time of action, that is, express its denotative meaning, the adverbial clause of time in this sample is not the case. The male is proud to say that he is ready to show his love, die for his female's love '*as Christ showed the Church when He died for her*'. The clause '*when He died for her*' has emotional connotation, which, in its turn, has its emotional influence on the female. The addition of the adverbial clause of cause is not made by chance either. The male intends '*to love his future wife as a part of himself*' and adds the clause starting with the subordinating conjunction *because*

to show the cause of his intention, 'because in His sight we shall be one'.

3. *"Though life may not always be as perfect as it is at this moment, I vow to always keep my love as pure as it is today. I promise to be there for you in your laughter and your tears, in your sickness and your health, in your comfort and your fears, in your poverty and your health. I know that our love is heaven sent, and I promise to be there for you for all your life, come what may"*.

Example 3 is a marriage vow including three types of sentences. It starts with a complex sentence, with an adverbial clause of concession. It denotes the presence of the obstacle 'though life not always being as perfect as it is at the moment', which, however, does not hinder the action expressed in the principal clause. The adverbial clause is put at the beginning of the sentence in preference to the principal clause inasmuch as there is a matter of stressing the idea of 'always keeping love pure' under the circumstance of an obstacle. Thus, its use in front position is logically motivated. The second sentence is a simple extended one consisting of a number of homogenous parts having the same function, that is, the adverbial modifier of place. And the third sentence is an example of compound-complex sentence.

Moving to the grammar and semantics of the clause, a matrimony vow is a piece of discourse which has a wide series of declarative sentences. The overwhelming presence of declarative sentences in marriage vows is not by chance. To utter a marriage vow is to make a pledge. Making a pledge is making statements, both affirmative and negative, which, in its turn, is the first factor conditioning the predominance of declarative sentences in marriage vows. The second factor by which is conditioned the predominance of declarative sentences is the type of discourse. A marriage vow first pledged by the man and then by the woman does not assume conversation in the real sense of the word. Accordingly, interrogative and imperative sentences lack to some degree, but they can't be thoroughly precluded. Of course, declarative negative sentences are preferred to be seldom used as they remind of unpleasant things, whereas a wedding vow must be a merging of optimism, devotion and love always keeping positive. One may grasp from the sentence 'I'll never let you down or cause you a moment of pain ever again' that John (John is forwarding his words to Marlina) is making a positive promise. And the negative meaning of the sentence fades. But it is not the case. The fact that John has already let Marlina down or caused her a moment of pain once is made clear by the words *ever again*. Hence, this sentence is considered to be a 'spray of negative feelings, which 'spoils' the vow in a way'. It is worth mentioning here that the use of declarative negative sentences is conditioned by the semantics of the speech. If the past life and details of it are inserted in the vow, then negative sentences comprising a promise of not doing it ever again are inevitable, like in the following case.

"When I married you, I vowed to honor, cherish and love you for the rest of my life. I know there've been moments where I have let you down and

disappointed you, but I vow, tonight, before you, before God that with all my heart I will try never ever to disappoint you again”.

And if the speech refers only to the future, which must hope, in this case, only for the best, and there is no reverberation to the past, then negative sentences cannot appear, like in the following example,

“With all my heart I take you to be my wife. I will try to be understanding, and to trust in you completely. I will make you a part of me and in turn, become a part of you. We will be equal partners in an open, honest relationship throughout the years”.

Declarative affirmative sentences make the kernel of a vow. Marriage is a joyous occasion. Both the male and the female must make a speech able to convey their nice feelings, thoughts and, of course, their kind intentions to each other. This may only be done through affirmative sentences. *‘This is my solemn vow’, ‘I love you’, ‘With this ring I thee wed’, ‘With all my heart, I make this pledge to you’, ‘I pledge thee my troth’, ‘This is my promise to you’* are all declarative affirmative pattern sentences used at the end of mainly all marriage vows stating the fact of solemn vow, love, wed, pledge and promise.

Interrogative and imperative sentences also have their role in the discourse of marriage vows, but they are seldom used. It has been stated above why these types of sentences are few in number, such as, *‘Can I love you anymore completely than I do right now?’* or *‘Can you do the same, can you make that pledge?’*. As the marriage vow is now thought to be a passive dialogue between two interlocutors, it excludes the use of veritable questions addressed to the addressee with the expectation of a reply. *‘Can I love you anymore than I do right now’* is a rhetoric question Carly addressees to herself, which can’t suppose a response and which, certainly, does not result in a conversation.

“Carly: ‘I am feeling so fulfilled right now. When you said what you just said about me, I thought: ‘Can I love you anymore completely than I do right now?’ Well, I’m going to have the rest of my life to find that out’.

Imperative sentences don’t provide a large number either, as they serve to induce a person to do something. Naturally, a marriage vow is not a piece of discourse to include an order, command or demand. Commissive sentences are chiefly used at the end of the vow as partly a pledge and partly an offer. *‘Receive this ring as a token of wedded love and faith’,* this sentence is a part of a vow as it is spoken as a logical continuation of speech. Why logical, for there comes the time of presenting the ring and making the pledge after having uttered the key speech, like in *‘In token and pledge of the vow between us made, with this ring I thee wed; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen’.* The above-presented sentence is also thought to be an offer as the implication of offering a ring is outlined in it in the form of a proposal. As far as the second imperative sentence is concerned, it is a request. The addressee is asked to kiss and love the addresser, and the addresser accounts for the cause of

making a request 'for I can't help falling in love with you' in 'So kiss me and love me tender for I can't help falling in love with you'.

Hence, the analysis of marriage vows at the levels of clauses and clause combination enables us to conclude that the structure and semantics of clauses and their means of cohesion are determined by definite communicative intentions. This comes to prove why more often composite sentences are used in marriage vows, and how the secondary clauses, which are of great pragmatic value, can help speakers reach their communicative aims.

References

1. Chouliaraki L., Fairclough N., *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.
2. Fairclough N., *Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse // Discourse and Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992b.
3. Wodak R., *Disorders of Discourse*, London: Longman, 1996.
4. Fairclough N., Wodak R., *Critical Discourse Analysis*, in T van Dijk (ed) *Discourse as Social Interaction*. Vol. 2, London: Sage, 1997
5. Каушанская В.Л., Грамматика Английского Языка. Ленинград, издательство Просвещение, 1973.
6. www.weddingwonderful.com; www.WeddingSpeechCentral.com; <http://www.trustyguides.com/wedding-vows.html>