

Stylistic Devices in Marriage Vows



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A literal text is not merely an entity of lexical and grammatical, but also of special linguistic units called stylistic devices and expressive means. Stylistic devices are used by the writer or speaker to intentionally intensify some typical structural or semantic property of a language unit (Galperin 1977:29-30).

The use of a certain stylistic device in a piece of discourse is the proof of the writer's or speaker's subjective original view and of his/her evaluation of things. Accordingly, viewing and evaluating something subjectively aims at having a specific impact on the reader or hearer. Thus, this or that stylistic device embodied in a literary text makes it more expressively, evaluatively and subjectively connoted, which, in its turn, presupposes the existence of a stylistically coloured piece of discourse.

Marriage vows as a type of formulaic discourse are not an exception in this respect. Furthermore, a marriage vow is considered to be a kind of discourse, where the use of certain stylistic devices is even "demanded". The necessary and preferable use of some lexical and structural syntactical stylistic devices is logically argued.

Marriage vows are a piece of formulaic discourse where creative images are inserted, inasmuch as there is an accepted point of view that vowers are fond of going in-depth and are creative in their wedding speech. It means that each vower wishes his/her speech to be more impressive than the other's, and its impact to be stronger.

Thus, the application of some lexical and structural syntactical stylistic devices in marriage vows proves that pledgers, both the male and the female, are apt to provide their "listener" with additional information, either emotional or logical. Hereinafter, two of the most potent means of creating images and conveying the subjective attitude of the writer, that is, *metaphor* and *epithet* are the objects of our study.

Metaphor is one of the most powerful means of creating images due to the power of realizing two lexical meanings simultaneously (Galperin 1977:140). The metaphors we come across in wedding vows are mainly speech metaphors. All the below-mentioned genuine metaphors are made up and used by the speakers in their speech. They are all characterized by their unexpectedness and unpredictability. In the following analysis we have three cases of metaphors, all expressed by verbs.

Here is a metaphor expressed by the verb *to fail*: "Our love will never fail". Based

on the view that there is no true similarity, but a kind of identification (Galperin 1977:140), we can conclude that the action of failing is probably identified with the action of losing. If the author preferred the verb *to lose* instead of the verb *to fail*, the stylistic colouring of his speech would be neutral, i.e. devoid of any stylistic overtones. In case of *a failing love* the speaker's words acquire more expressiveness, as the lexical meaning of the verb *to fail* defines the feeling of loss more deeply.

Words like a needle can etch if they are sharply and duly said, as in "Every word you said it etched in my heart". If the speaker uttered his thoughts saying "Every word you said impressed me a lot" or "Every word you said deeply influenced me", he would not sound as dramatic as he wished. The use of the verb *to etch* in the above example is stylistically coloured. The verbs *to impress* or *to influence* are considered to be neutral words, which implies lack of stylistic colouring. The verb *to etch* is used here in its metaphorical meaning; the action of etching is probably identified with the action of making painful effects on somebody. So, this stylistic connotation makes the speaker's idea more emphatic.

Using the metaphor *my faith wavered*, the groom means that he had some hesitations about his love and attitude to his bride in the past as it may be true about every newly born feeling. In case the speaker utters some stylistically neutral speech, he/she sounds less expressive, thus making a less expressive impact on the hearer. Lack of impressiveness in its turn presupposes less emotional or evaluative connotation of speech. If the speaker said "I hesitated about keeping faith with you", his speech would fail to have the due expressive-evaluative stylistic effect. Meanwhile the use of the verb *to waver* in its metaphorical meaning truly expresses the speaker's exact idea about his behaviour. In marriage vows we are sure to come across metaphors, like *to repair and restore their marriage and their family, to celebrate life with you, God has ordained this love, I happily give you life, I broke your heart, yesterday's pain will fade away, I have never wavered in the strength of my love for you*.

The *epithet* is a less strong means of displaying the writer's or speaker's emotional attitude to his communication than metaphor, but still a forceful one. The epithets used in marriage vows convey the subjective attitude of the speaker, that is, the groom or bride, to his or her speech. The presence of an epithet in the vower's speech means that his/her aim is to personally characterize and evaluate some object or phenomenon and, consequently, impose his/her subjective perception and evaluation on the hearer. And it is not by chance that the prevailing epithets used in marriage vows are associated epithets, such as *true wife/husband, lifelong commitment, enabling power, deep love, full devotion, helping hand*. The adjectives *true, lifelong, enabling, deep, full* and *helping* point to a feature which is essential to the person/object/phenomenon they describe, and the idea expressed in the epithet is in some way inherent in the concept of the object. So, it is vital for the wife/husband to be true; that is, faithful, devoted. Along with associated epithets there appear unassociated epithets, such as *holy ordinance, shared tears, holy desire, lonely street, burning love*, which may characterise the object by an unexpected feature. If, for example, the groom addresses his words to his bride saying "I have a *big* desire to take you to be my wife", the adjective *big* expresses the very inherent feature

of the noun *desire* and does not strike the hearer by its novelty, whereas the adjective *holy* referring to the same noun does. And the speaker emphasizes his idea through the use of the epithet *holy desire* inasmuch as he aims at “compelling” his bride to see and evaluate his desire the way he does. So, we can conclude from the above-mentioned that the emotional-evaluative perception of the epithet by the addressee is highly conditioned by the same emotional-evaluative perception on the part of the addresser. This is what the bride or groom wishes to achieve when she or he uses an epithet. There are many marriage vows including different types of epithets, which are not directly connected with the vowers’ desires and intentions, but do have their specific colouring referring to this or that noun. They are transferred epithets, such as *soulless city*, *divine assistance*, *funny hand*, and reversed epithets, such as, *time of failure*, *journey of marriage*, *hour of happiness*, *a time of triumph*, *a vision of hope*.

The next lexical stylistic device worth mentioning is *stylistic periphrasis* mostly used in marriage vows. The sentence “In sickness, I will nurse you back to health” is the affirmation of periphrasis. A full sentence “I will nurse you back to health” is a periphrasis, a phrasing in place of a possible shorter form of expression, such as *to cure* or *to treat*. The purpose of the speaker to give his/her preference to this stylistic periphrasis is to produce the necessary stylistic effect by expressing an individual idea of the concept because by saying “In sickness, I will cure you” or “In sickness, I will heal you” he would not sound expressive and emotional enough. Here is another example of stylistic periphrasis: “In this sacred place I want you to know that...”. The adverbial modifier of place “in this sacred place” is a periphrasis for the word *church*. This periphrasis is widely used in marriage vows for in the vast majority of cases marriage vows are pledged in church. The deciphering of the concept is not difficult as it is present in a clearly understandable context; the bride or groom is uttering these words in church in his or her wedding vow speech. *An affirmation of love* is one more example of periphrasis, which stands for *vow*. *An affirmation of love* is deliberately preferred by the speaker as the noun *vow* would certainly be devoid of any aesthetic value, whereas the expression *an affirmation of love* carries not only that aesthetic value, but is also emotively coloured.

Formulaic Discourse, like any other type of discourse, is of great interest not only from the viewpoint of lexical stylistic devices, but also from that of structural syntactical stylistic devices. Syntactical stylistic devices are perceived as elaborate designs aimed at having a definite impact on the reader (Galperin 1977:203).

Vows are written according to the writer’s values and taste; the formulas vary in accordance with the educational background of the person. Nevertheless, in the vast majority of vows the sentences are syntactically arranged in the same way. The word order in this type of formulaic discourse is 95% fixed, which can be illustrated by sentences, like “I love you”, “I marry you”, “I give you my life”, “I will cherish our union”, “I promise you”, “I choose you”. The fixed word order in this type of formulaic discourse does not mean that stylistic inversion lacks. Unlike grammatical inversion, stylistic inversion does not change the structural meaning of the sentence. It aims at attaching logical stress or additional emotional colouring to the surface meaning of the utterance (Galperin 1977:204).

The role of inversion is significant as it gives the full sentence expressive-emotional colouring. Different patterns of stylistic inversion are met in the discourse of marriage vows. The most common uses of inversion are when the adverbial modifier is placed at the beginning of the sentence. In English the adverbial modifier or clause of time usually goes to the end of the sentence. As prof. Smirnitsky states, “the use of the adverbial modifier of time in front position of the sentence should be highly motivated”. And that motivation is the speaker’s or addresser’s intention to specially intensify the time. In the following examples of inversion “In health, I will encourage you on your path”, “From this moment I, name, take you, name, as my best friend for life”, “In sickness, I will nurse you back to health”, “When our way becomes difficult, I promise to stand by you and uplift you” the above-mentioned is evidently fixed. Encouraging his way on her path or promising to stand by is important for the groom to do, but it is of more significance to say and emphasize when he is going to do. That is why the adverbial modifiers or clauses appear in the front position in the sentences given above. So, the communicative focus of the utterance is not what to do, but when to do it. If we carry out our analysis on the basis of functional sentence perspective, that is, on the basis of theme-rheme distinction, we can suggest that *in health, in sickness, from this moment* and *when our way becomes difficult* become the rheme of the sentences. In the sentence “Always will I perform my headship over you” both the adverbial modifier of time and the auxiliary verb are placed before the subject. Here stylistic inversion aims at attaching not only additional emotional colouring, but also logical stress. The adverb *always* and the auxiliary verb *will* acquire logical stress and may be included in the rhematic part of the sentence.

The same function is realized by the adverbial modifier of place or direction in front position. By putting it at the beginning and making it the rheme of the sentence the speaker intends to make his/her speech emotively coloured. The following examples are taken from various marriage vows, “In this sacred place I want you to know that...”, “Through the pressures of the present and the uncertainties of the future, I promise to be faithful to you”, “Through all the uncertainties and trials of the present and future, I promise to be faithful to you and love you”, “Through the good and bad, I want you to always know that I will be by your side”. Giving a promise to be faithful, be by her side and love her is not the fundamental idea the groom is eager to express. The expressiveness of his speech lies in emphasizing the condition of his actions by using the adverbial modifier in front position. It’s worth mentioning the obvious difference between the first “In this sacred place I want you to know that” and the following three examples “Through the pressures of the present and the uncertainties of the future, I promise to be faithful to you”, “Through all the uncertainties and trials of the present and future, I promise to be faithful to you and love you”, “Through the good and bad, I want you to always know that I will be by your side”. In the first case the place indicated is a place in the literal meaning of the word, *in this sacred place*, whereas in the other cases *place* is used in a metaphorical sense: *through the pressures of the present and the uncertainties of the future*.

There is a tendency to account for inversion in poetry by rhythmical considerations (Galperin 1977:205). But almost any piece of prose, though in essence arhythmical, can

be made rhythmical by isolating words or sequences of words and making appropriate pauses between them (Galperin 1977:135). The following two examples of marriage vows are the best ones to illustrate the presence of rhythm in inversion.

“In sickness, I will nurse you back to health. In health, I will encourage you on your path. In sadness, I will help you to remember. In happiness, I will be there to make memories with you. In poverty, I will do all that I can to make our love rich. And in wealth, I will never let our love grow poor.”

“Once before I have stood with you before family and friends;
Once again I take your hand as my partner.”

The *parallel construction* is another syntactical stylistic device, which may be encountered in the discourse of marriage vows. Sentences may comprise parallel constructions by repetition of words: “I will love you through the good and bad, through the joy and the sorrow”: Besides, there may be identical syntactical structures in two or more sentences or parts of a sentence in close succession:

“Now we will feel no rain
For each of us will be shelter to each other.
And now we will feel no cold
For each of us will be warmth to each other”.

The following sample is an illustration of not only a parallel construction, but also of repetition, “I, - , give to you, - , a new promise and yet not so new; a new (husband/wife), and yet so new; and a new affirmation of love”. Giving preference to the above-mentioned two stylistic devices the addressers intend to emotionally influence their addressees. But compared with parallel construction, which is more emotional in nature, repetition as a stylistic device is of more logical than emotional character. Uttering “I will love you through the good and bad, through the joy and the sorrow” the bride/groom does not logically emphasize this or that word, especially when there is no stylistic inversion. In case of repetition “I, - , give to you, - , a new promise and yet not so new; a new (husband/wife), and yet so new; and a new affirmation of love” the speaker emphatically utters some word (*new*) or expression (*yet not so new*), because he finds it necessary to fix the attention of his hearer on the key word or idea. Many betrothed ones get together and first discuss general rules for their vows. For example, they discuss how long their vows should be (approximately 5 or 6 sentences), whether or not they should use the words *I love you* or *You are my best friend*. And it must be natural that none of them is eager to write a book of vows while the other just says a few simple things, so they make sure to discuss it beforehand. Thus, this jointly written piece of discourse should result in having repeated speech.

Male: “I, - , take you - , to be my wedded wife. To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish, ‘till death do us part. And hereto I pledge you my faithfulness”.

Female: “I, - , take you - , to be my wedded husband. To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish, ‘till death do us part. And hereto I pledge you my faithfulness”.

It is quite easy to suggest that each vower is in some way under the stress of strong

emotions. So, we can say that the use of these stylistic devices is logically grounded. Hence, we may conclude from our analysis how important the application of this or that stylistic device is. The bride or groom uses a lexical or syntactical stylistic device in his or her marriage vow as he/she aims at having some impact on the hearer, be it logical or emotive. That is to say, the choice of the stylistic device is highly conditioned by the pledger's speech and communicative intention.

References:

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Սույն հոդվածում քննության են առնվում ամուսնական երղումներում կիրառվող ոճական ինարները: Ամուսնական երղումների լեզվաոճական առանձնահատկությունների ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ այս կամ այն ոճական ինարի գործածությունը հետապնդում է կոնկրետ հաղորդակցական նպատակներ, այն է՝ խոսքին հաղորդել զգացմունքային-գնահատողական երանգ, ոճական արտահայտչականություն և պատկերավորություն: Շատ ամուսնական երղումներում տեսանելի է զույգերի ստեղծագործ միտքը, անձնական վերաբերմունքն ու վառ երևակայությունը՝ արտահայտված այնպիսի լեզվաոճական ինարներով, ինչպիսիք են **փոխաբերությունը, մակդիրը, շրջասությունը, ոճական շրջուն շարադասությունը, զուգահեռական կառույցն ու թվարկումը:**