



Acts in Marriage Solemnization Text: A Pragmatic Study of Church and Court Marriage

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Abstract: Marriage institution is a very important and serious institution. Its importance and seriousness stems from the fact that it is the union of two distinct adults- each with his / her own peculiarities- for the purpose of procreation and companionship among others. This therefore requires a very careful and serious approach and the format for its enactment appropriately articulated. This study entitled **Acts in Marriage Solemnization Texts: a Pragmatic Study of Court and Church marriage** is an analytic study of the pragmatic techniques employed in both Christian and Court marriages. It is with the aim of determining the effectiveness or impact of the text in sustaining the institution of marriage in this divorce-ridden age of ours. The theoretical framework of Speech Act is the basis for the study. More particularly, Searl's taxonomy of speech Act which gave more prominence to illocutionary force was the focus. Consequently, the texts were analyzed as the actions taken by whoever officiates at the marriage ceremony with the aim of determining the perlocutionary effects they have on the couple while they live their marital lives. Our basic finding reveals that Christian marriage text has more of Assertives, moderate Commissives and little Directives. There are however no presence of Expressives and Declaratives. The Court marriage text on its own has the highest percentage of Directives, equal percentage of Commissives and Assertives, little Declarative and very little Expressives. In sum, the court marriage text employed all the five Acts. The paper concludes that the nature of the text is reasonably responsible for the perception and consequently the attitude of the couple in the institution of marriage.

Key words: Speech Acts, Marriage, Communication and Language.

Introduction

Marriage, an institution that unites a man and a woman into husband and wife is, to say the least, a very serious institution. Everything pertaining to its establishment and enactment should therefore be seen in that light and consequently be given the requisite seriousness and attention it deserves.

Two individuals do not just come together and a marriage is instituted. There has to be some form of agreement; there has to be some rituals and official procedure laid down for it. Component of one of such procedure is the marriage text. Except the traditional marriage rites, all other forms of marriage rites are documented. The documentation therefore ensures uniformity of pattern in enacting the institution of marriage.

Because marriage has a primacy of place in human affairs, care is to be taken to ensure that after instituting it, it does not just crash. Evidence of crashed marriages abound and statistics show that reason for their failure

sometimes stem from the psychological unpreparedness of the individual- a misconception of their entire phenomenon. Contributing to the role and importance of marriage, Woods (2000) writes:

The consequence of marriage affects every aspects of society. It occupies the most intimate aspect of personal privacy and personal love and reaches the pillar of the sacred institution of culture. Marriage is not only the pillar of society; it is also the pillar of government, business and the military. Marriage cuts to the very heart of a nation. It infiltrates every aspect of human life, not only for the married but also for the unmarried. When marriages prosper, the nation rises; when marriages fails, the nation fails. Divorce not only rattles the foundation of the judicial system and psychiatry, but through its influence on children, alters the cause of the next generation.

The above very aptly captures the importance of marriage and consequently its place in human society. A failure of marriage institution ultimately translates to a failure of society. Such is the primacy of place the institution the institution of marriage occupies in the affairs of man.

A happy marriage leads to happy lives of the individuals involved. If the happiness that emanates from happy marriage is worth pursuing, it is therefore pertinent to seek it. Seeking such happiness cuts across all facets of the institution including, very importantly, studying the text for the solemnization of marriage. The study will therefore give one an inroad into getting to know the reason for happy marriage from the point of view of the linguistic elements employed in its enactment. This will ultimately trigger its pursuit.

Marriage institution is a very important and serious institution. Its importance and seriousness stems from the fact that it is the union of two distinct adults- each with his / her own peculiarities- for the purpose of procreation and companionship among others. From the foregoing, the place of marriage in the life of human being is laid bare. It is its importance therefore that is the driving force for the study of its text which is the crux of this research work.

Language, Communication and Human Activities

At the centre of human activities stands language. Language pervades social life. It is the principal vehicle for transmission of cultural knowledge, and the primary means by which one gains access to the others' minds. Language is therefore central to communication. The relationship between language and communication is intertwined.

Language according to Merriam Webster's dictionary is defined as a system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other.

Diach (2012) defines language as "a system of arbitrary, productive, dynamics, having variation and human vocal symbol used by human being to carry out their social affairs".

All human activities are carried out with the aid of language. Language can either be vocal or sign. This therefore leads to the functions of language which could be seen from different perspective thus- the speaker's, the listener's; the topic of discourse, the code and ultimately the message perspective. The utility value of language is deduced from any of the above stated points of view.

In carrying out human activities using language, communication is the ultimate destination. If language is used and communication did not take place, the aim therefore is defeated. Consequently, it will be congruent to look at communication.

According to Diach (2012), "Communication is the process by which information is exchange

between/among individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour".

From the foregoing one sees language, human activities and communication as being inseparable interconnected. In the light of our study, we can deduce from the foregoing that language, used in the form of text, is the vehicle for communicating the tenets, ethics, reasons and essence of marriage. The study of language use in this area of human activity is important because of its importance in the overall affairs of human existence.

Speech Act Theory

In studying Speech Act Theory, credit is given J.L. Austin, a British philosopher whose work constituted the first corpus that area. Though Austin is given the credit for propounding the theory, other scholars have immensely contributed to its development and consequently its status today. Some of such scholars include: J.L Searle, Levinson, Ross, Lakoff, Sadok, Hebermas etc.

Speech Act theory focuses on speakers utterances and hearer's uptake. Examining the business of Speech Act theory, Enyi (2015) says:

The crux of speech act theory lies on the quest to understand and explain how speakers and hearers use language to, put aptly, understand what language is capable of doing or to understand ways in which language could be used as an instrument of performance rather than just a tool to describe reality.

Speech-Act theory looks at language as being used to perform actions rather than just being used to state the state of affairs. In this regard, to speak is to perform an action especially if the outcome of such speech is to be considered.

Austin (1962) in Enyi (2015) concurs with the above assertion thus: "It was far too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a statement is or can only be to describe some state of affairs or facts which it must do either truly or falsely.

At the initial stage of the development of Speech Act theory, Austin first started with utterances he called Constantives and Performatives. The Constantive he described as true or false statement like the declarative in mood structure while the Performatives he saw as utterance used to do things or strong action taking sentences that go out to do what they say.

A later review of that proposition led him to come up with the claim that when we speak, we perform three different kinds of action: Illocutionary, Locutionary and Perlocutionary Acts. Preceded by the three above is locution itself.

According to Austin (1962) "Locution includes the utterance of certain noise, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction and the utterance of them with a certain meaning...with a certain sense and with a certain reference".



The Locutionary Act is the actual utterance of the speaker; the Illocutionary is the understanding (in terms of mood feelings) made of the speaker's utterance by the addressee while the Perlocutionary Act refers to the effect such understanding has on the hearer /addressee which informs his conscious or unconscious action/reaction or even feeling. At the centre of all these equally is the Illocutionary force. The illocutionary force of an utterance is the way a speaker expects his utterance to be understood.

Illocution, in the words of Enyi, (2015) is "the performance of an act by saying something that is not descriptive and not subject to truth condition".

Herbermas (1998) opines: "while locution is the act of expressing state of affairs, Illocutionary acts are utterance in which a speaker performs an act by virtue of having said something".

Other Taxonomies of Speech Act

Though J.L Austin paved way into speech Act theory, other scholars contributed immensely towards its development. Prior to those contribution is also Austin's modification of his initial classification. Thus, Austin (1962) classified speech Acts as: Verdictives, (casting verdicts, umpiring, judging, vetoing etc) Exercisitives (exercising power or influence, giving a decision). Commissive (promise and declaration of intent), Behavitives (aspects of social behavior like congratulating, apologies, condoling, greeting etc) Expositives (fits utterances into arguments of conversation).

J.L. Searl, a student of Austin took a deeper look at the taxonomies. He saw it from a relatively different perspectives. Criticizing Austin he posits that rather than consider what utterance is produced, we should examine what point of force an utterance has. He identifies three ways in which an utterance can relate to reality thus:

- (i) Word-world fit (where a propositional content expresses reality)
- (ii) World-word (where reality is changed or modified as to accommodate or reflect propositional content)
- (iii) Null direction of fit (where the propositional content is taken)

Stepping this further, Searl classified illocutionary points into five- thus:

1. Assertives: They commit the speaker to something being the case. The different kinds are: suggesting, putting forward, swearing, boasting, concluding etc. Example: "No one makes a better cake than me".
2. Directives: They try to make the addressee perform an action. The different kinds are: asking, ordering, requesting, inviting, advising, begging etc. Example: "could you close the window?"
3. Commissive: They commit the speaker to doing something in the future. The different kinds are:

promising, vowing, betting, opposing.
Example: "I am going to Paris tomorrow".

4. Expressives: They express how the speaker feels about the situation. The different kinds are: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, deploring etc. Example: "I am sorry that I lied to you".
5. Declarations: They change the state of the world in an immediate way. Examples: "you are fired". "I swear, I beg you".

A marriage ceremony is a serious affair. Its seriousness drivers from the fact that it is a lasting affair that involves two different individuals with different backgrounds and orientations. To understand its importance, a certain formal procedure for its enactment has been laid down. It is these procedure that we examine here in the light of Searl (1999)'s taxonomy which focuses on utterance from the perspective of a speaker's intent and the hearer's understanding.

Analysis And Discussion Of Data

(A) Data of Church Marriage Text

(i) Text from Section one: (Rite of Marriage)

Locutions:

1. My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the church's minister and his community.
2. Christ abundantly blesses this love
3. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity.

Analysis and discussion of locutions 1-3

Locution 1-3 are Assertives that carry with them, the illocutionary force of asserting and stating facts. In solemn, yet emphatic sense, the minister first reminds the intending couple the purpose for which they have come. He reminds them of Christ's love for them and consequently reassures them of his assistance and continued sustenance as they journey into the institution of marriage. Assertive acts as we noted earlier, have word to world fit. This means that their proposition content express reality.

In this circumstance, the couple is assured of the reality of Christ's love and his preparedness to assist them cross the hurdles of marriage thus eliminating all possible forms of both fear and doubt that might arise as a result of probable, perceived or known weakness of either of the partners.

Locution

4. And so in the presence of the church, I ask you to state your intentions.



5. (Name) and (Name), have you come here freely and without reservations to give yourselves to each other in marriage?
6. Yes I have. (Both bride and groom individually answers).
7. Will you honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your life?
8. Yes I will. (Both bride and groom individually answers)
9. Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his church?
10. Yes I will. (Both bride and groom individually answers)

Analysis and discussion of locutions 4-10

Locutions 4–10 comprise a combination of two illocutionary points – Directives and Commissives. Specifically, locutions 4, 5, 7 and 9 are Directives while 6, 8 and 10 are all Commissives. Directive speech acts are used to perform acts such as requesting ordering, proposing, demanding etc. they have the illocutionary force of getting a hearer act according to the demand of the propositional content of the directive/instruction.

Here the minister, through the use of directive acts, demands that the couple on their own freely state their intention for coming together in the church. This is to ensure that there is no element of coercion or force on the couple as they embark on the journey of marriage. Through the use of directives the minister requests that they state their level of preparedness to honour each other perpetually as well as their commitment to freely accepting the children they will beget and raising them according to the church's law. By the use of directives, the minister through his question implies that the couple gets prepared to accept whatever gender of children they will get and in whatever order they will come. This equally wards off possible misunderstandings or rifts that may arise/result from child-bearing related issues.

Commissive speech acts which constitutes locutions 6, 8 and 10 are acts which when uttered have the illocutionary force of committing the speaker to undertake the course of action proposed by the speech act. In this context, more specifically, the commissive commits the intending couples to the propositional content of the act. It simply means that they are bound to live by the commitment they have made by responding to an earlier directives act which gave rise to the commissives. The couple, by using these commissive acts have accepted that:

- They freely and willingly came to get married
- They will honour each other for the rest of their lives
- They will freely accept the children God will give them and train them properly

Accepting all these presuppose a negation of anything to the contrary.

(ii) Text from section 2: (Exchange of Consent)

Locutions

11. Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your hands and declare your consent before God and man.

Analysis/discussion of locution 11

Locution 11 is a directive speech act which in the context of this locution is requesting an action from the intending couple. In response to the perlocutionary force, the couple joins their hands which is a symbol of unity. It is also a way of demonstrating mutual love which by implication means there should be no hatred.

Locution

12. (Name) take you to be my wife/husband.
13. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad; in sickness and in health; I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

Analysis and discussion of locution 12

Locution 12 is an assertive act. Assertive acts commit the hearer to the propositional content of the act. Propositions are presented here as representing state of affairs in the world". They have word to word fit.

Here, each of the couple is seen taking the other as a legitimate spouse. This is only made real by the assertion of the act. It is only at this point that marriage could be said to have taken place because with that declaration, which is preceded by the fulfillment of other conditions the individuals cease to be different units. They now became legitimate husbands and wife by virtue of that utterance of theirs.

Locution

14. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad; in sickness and in health; I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.

Analysis and discussion of location 14

Locution 14 is a Commissive which commits the speaker to doing something in the future. Commissives include promising, vowing, planning, oppressing, betting etc. Here, we find out that the couple are making promises to each other: promises to love, honour and be truthful to each other.

By making such promise, they invariably have committed themselves to the content of that proposition and are practically bound to live out the content of such commitment.

From this, one now discovers that the minister is not actually the one who weds couple. He only supervises and bears witness to what the couples do to themselves. Marriage therefore is a freewill exercise between the two individuals getting married.

Locution

15. You have declared your consent before the church. May the Lord, in his goodness, strengthen your consent and fill you both with blessings.
16. What God has joined, man must not divide.

Analysis and discussion of locutions 15 and 16

Locutions 15 and 16 are both assertive which commit the speaker to something being the case. In locution 15 specifically, the minister (who is the speaker) asserts that the couple have declared their consent before the people of God. Having done that therefore, he calls on God to strengthen their consent and bless the couple.

Locution 16 is another reflection of assertive where the speaker concludes that God has joined the couple and as such man, a lower being, should by no means divide them.

(B) Data of Court Marriage Text

Texts from Section 1-(Introduction to the marriage procedure)

Location

- (1) We are together here in the presence of these witnesses to join this man and woman in matrimony which is an honourable estate, and is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly but reverently and discretely.
- (2) If anyone can show just cause why this man and this woman may not lawfully be joined together, let them speak now or hereafter remain silent.
- (3) Name (groom) and (Bride), I require and charge you both that if either of you know any reason why you may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, you do now confess.
- (4) If any persons are joined together otherwise than as provided by law, their marriage is not lawful.

Analysis and discussion of locutions 1- 4

Locution 1- 4 are Assertive and Directives. More specifically, locution1 is an Assertive. Here the solemnizer states the fact of the reason for their gathering. By so doing, both the speaker and the hearers are committed to the reality of the reasons for their assembling. The assertive there has a word to world fit in which case might be true or otherwise. It is of truth that why they gathered was to witness the marriage ceremony. By this statement, the illocutionary force of awareness of the reason for their being together is awaked in them.

Locution 2 and 3 are both particularly Directive Acts. Directive acts require actions from the hearer or addressee. In this circumstance, the officiant or solemnizer requires a response (action) from the intending couple. This action of responding (depending on their response) will determine whether the ceremony will progress or be stopped. Because Directives have a word to world fit. They have the capacity of gathering the bride and groom (in this case) to change the world with their word through their answers which will considerably determine the continuation or termination of the exercise.

Locution 4 is on an Assertive Act. As an Assertive act as pointed out earlier, it commits the hearer to the proposition content of the act. In this case therefore, the

intending couple as well as all the witnesses are reminded of the illegality of any union outside the prescriptions of the law. By so doing, the solemnizer reaffirms the authenticity and legality of the duties he is about to perform. Through that Act too, he reminds the intending couple of the legitimacy and thus seriousness associated with what they are about to do. By so doing, they are given the consciousness about what they are about to get into and the surrounding conditions attached to it.

(ii) Texts from Section 2: (Exchange of vows)

Locations:

- (5) Name (Bride/Groom) will you take this woman/man to your wedded wife/husband; to live together in the estate of matrimony?
- (6) I will (Bride/Groom answers individually)
- (7) Will you love, honour and keep him/her in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, keeping yourselves only for him/her as long as you both shall live?
- (8) I will (Bride and Groom answers individually).

Analysis and discussion of locutions 5 – 8

In locution 5 and 7 which are both directives, the officiant requests from the intending couple a Statement of their level of commitment to each other. He requires to ascertain their level of preparedness to live together and the extent to which they can be faithful to each other. Because the illocutionary point of a directive is to try to get a hearer to behave in such a way as to make his behavior match the propositional content of the directive, it presupposes that there acts requires a response from the couple. The responses which in itself is an act will lead us to the next locution.

Commissive Acts which commits the speaker to undertake a course of action proposed in the utterance's propositional content is what significantly reflects in locutions 6 and 8.

We notice here how the couple by virtue of the answers they gave to the preceding question (which are directives) commits themselves to the propositional content of these assertive. Consequently, they accept to live together, love and respect each other and most importantly be faithful to each other.

Location

- (9) (Name) take (Name) by the hand and repeat after me:
- (10) I, (Name) take thee (Name) to be my wedded wife/husband; to have and to hold from this day forward; for better for worse; for richer for poor, in sickness and health; to love and to cherish until death do us part.

Analysis and discussion of locution 9 – 10

Locution 9 is a Directive. It requests an action from the hearer – action of “taking by the hand”. This is to ensure unity and bond while they undertake the next course of action.

A commissive act of very high magnitude is noticed in locution 10. Here, the couple, by virtue of what they said,

pledge their faithfulness, their commitment, their love and their lasting fidelity to each other. By this act, they state their preparedness to be for/with each other regardless of every other circumstantial interference.

Texts from section 3: (Giving and receiving of Rings)

Locutions

10. For as much as (Name) and (Name) have consented together in wedlock and have witnessed the same before this company, and thereto have given and pledge their truth, each to the other, and having declared the same by joining hands.
11. Now, by the authority vested by the law of (mention place) as the (mention position) pronounce you to be husband and wife.
12. And extend to you my best wishes for a successful and happy married life together.

Analysis and discussion locution 11-13

Locution 11 is an assertive which commits the speaker to something being the case. It presents the proposition as something being the state of affairs. The speaker (in this case the officiant) states that the couple had earlier pledged their commitment to each other by virtue of the earlier statements which were commissives. This assertive which has a word to world fit ends up preparing grounds for another Act that will follow.

The officiant uses this assertive to justify the next Act he is about to perform. He implies that the next act is a consequence of the assertive Act.

Locution 12 is a Declarative. A declarative changes the world in an immediate way. The illocutionary force of a declarative is to bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed. This means that by virtue of having successfully declared something, one has created something not hitherto in existence.

In this case, the officiant, by virtue of what he said, became the one finally made the man and woman husband and wife. Having pronounced them so, because all necessary conditions have been met, they legally became husband and wife from the point of declaration.

An expressive Act is seen in locution 13. An expressive expresses the feelings or state mind of the speaker about a particular situation. In this context, the speaker expresses feelings of happiness to the couple whom he just declared husband and wife.

Locution

13. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Mr. and Mrs. (Name).

Analysis and discussion of locution 14

This is a declaration which as earlier stated carries the force of bringing about a change in the world. By virtue of this declaration, the designation of the man and the woman has been changed. The woman automatically assumes the man's name and from that instance, remains so.

Table of Frequency

S/no	Acts	Frequency (%)			
		Church Text		Court Text	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Assertives	06	40%	03	22%
2	Commissives	05	33%	03	21%
3	Directives	04	27%	05	36%
4	Expressives	00	00%	01	7%
5	Declaratives	00	00%	02	14%
	Total No Locutions	15	100%	14	100%

Analysis of Table of Frequency:

Church Marriage Texts:

The church marriage texts reveal the highest percentage of Assertives which is followed by many Commissives and finally few Directives. There is however no reflection of Expressives and Declaration.

The table of data shows that court marriage text employs all the 5 taxonomies of speech Act according to Searl (1999)'s classification.

There is the highest preponderance of Directives, followed by Assertives, then moderate Commissive, some Declarations and very little percentage of Expressives.

Court Marriage Texts

Conclusion



From the table above, one discovers the glaring disparity between the two - texts of church and court marriages. In the text of church marriage, one sees the highest preponderance of Assertives which is an indication that they had been a hitherto agreement between the two individuals, before coming to the church. By the text revealing higher Assertives, the present minister is only reaffirming that their coming together to the church was just to reenact an already existing state of affairs.

This now reveals that the actual union had earlier taken place (probably between the couple and their both parents) before the couple come to the church. In the church text too, there is a reasonable level of Commissives which indicates that the couple commit themselves to each other in the presence of the minister and the congregation.

The Directives constitute the smallest percentage which is an indication that the couple were only guided a little to concretize their decisions. The court text, unlike the church's reveals a preponderance of Directives which is an indication that couple who do court wedding are directed more on what to do.

Assertive and Commissives are of equal percentage. This may be interpreted to mean that the level to which they commit themselves may be the same level to which the officiant asserts it. That means that prior to a court wedding; they may not have been any other agreements between the couple earlier. They could go to the court, then the officiant directs them on what to do, they do it by way of commitment to each other, the officiant asserts what they had done, expresses his feelings and consequently declares them husband and wife.

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