# TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION IN PROVERBIAL PHRASES FROM THE BIBLE

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***Abstract:*** *The present paper is a study of the coordination and subordination relations that are established on a syntactic and semantic level in the analysis of proverbial phrases. The aim is to show that only by identifying the right type of relationships that are established between different types of sentences and by analysing them, can one attempt to grasp the true meaning of the paremiological text and, in this case, of biblical proverbs.*

***Key-Words:*** *main clause, subordinate clause, Book of Proverbs, phrase*

The binary structure of literal proverbs often entails the existence of two main sentences that are coordinated by copulative or adversative conjunctions, according to the class they belong to: one of the two major classes of the composition of proverbs, inclusion and reproduction.

a) *Pride goeth before destruction: and the spirit is lifted up before a fall.* (16,18);
*He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it: and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return to him.* (26,27);
*By the fruit of his own mouth shall a man be filled wlth good things, and according to the works of his hands it shall be repaid him.* (12,14);

b) *Of the fruit of his own month shall a man be filled with good things: but the soul of transgressors is wicked.* (13,2);

c) *The tongue of the just is as choice silver: but the heart of the wicked is nothing worth.* (10,20);
*The wicked maketh an unsteady work: but to him that soweth justice, there is a faithful reward.* (11,18).

There are few utterances that come with their literal sense, namely that are made up of only one sentence; in the terminology from the treatises on floklore they are called 'sayings' and they are considered a class related to that of the proverbs. The mono-member structure justifies their classing in a category of their own:

*The robberies of the wicked shall be their downfall.* (21,7).

Instead, the amplified structures in which we keep the standard symmetry based on association or opposition, respectively on copulative or adversative

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coordination are increasing, while each of the two members is doubled. Apart from the examples above (26, 27; 13, 12; 11, 18) several others can be added:

*If a wise man contend with a fool, whether he be angry, or laugh, he shall find no rest.* (29,9) so on and so forth.

• Among the subordination relations, the relation between a subject clause and its main clause is the most frequent one. Syntax is here subject to the universal logical scheme of any utterance, made up of a logical Subject (minima), a logical Predicate (maxima) and the conjunction. The differences between languages come essentially from the different possibilities of expressing the subject, as the predicate, being the axis of the phrase in any language, stays relatively stable. The subject can be simple, in minimal utterances like:

*Whoever is slothful will not roast his game* (12,27).

In most cases, expressing the subject has to outrun the limits of the denotative function, because its usage as standard element for the receiver, its parable function for which it was actually selected in the respective utterance, supposes a concise description, but one loaded with connotations. And this can be done by replacing the noun with a substantivised adjective, as in the example above, either through a present or past participle, or through a periphrasis or a subject clause, formed by developing the simple subject.

If we say:

[*Some people* will not roast their game]

the receiver understands the message on the level of the negative statement particularly, but when we say:

*Whoever is slothful....*

one understands that *all* people from the respective category act in the same way.

In other words, just as neither the rest of the utterance could have remained at the zero level, that of the denotative [Some people don't like exertion], but is figuratively coloured („they don't rost their game"), nor the subject can remain at this level.

Old languages also use nouns or adjective substitutes, generally adverbials, that have the capacity to express synthetically both the signified and the signifier ('the lazy/slothful man', 'the man who hates work', etc.). The Romanian language has, in this respect, fewer possibilities than the Hebrew, Greek, Latin or even Slavonic languages. One can use substantivised adjectives (*the lazy one, the greedy one, the avaricious one, the wise one, the mad one, etc*.), past (passive) participles (*pățitul* in „Tot pățitu-i priceput"/ *the fried* in 'The fried one is qualified') *gathered* (the gathered fortune), but one cannot use present (active) particples, natural occurrences of the verb often used in such contexts in classcal languages. In the case of the Latin *providens*, 'provident'/'prudent', the Romanian interpreter oscillates between „*Prevăzătorul* (îşi agoniseşte din timp hrana)"/ *The prudent one (collects his food in good season)* and „*Cine este prevăzător* îşi agoniseşte..."/ *Whoever is prudent collects...*, because none of the readings corresponds to the

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original. In the same way, for *peritus*, the interpreter could use a periphrasis *Omul priceput* (cf. 17,24) / *The skilled man*, but he prefers an amplification of this periphrasis in the corresponding sentence, obtained by developping the respective part of the sentence: he who does (not) have skill (cf. 17,16).

The translator's confusion must have been so much bigger as the terms from this onomasiological group are extremely frequent in biblical proverbs, since they relate to the practical, applicative component of 'wisdom', the central term of the whole Book of Proverbs (according to *supra*, 2..., 'wisdom' means 'knowledge/science' + 'skill/proficiency', with all the complementary attributes – parsimony, industry, generosity, just spirit, etc.). In the exact context from which we have extracted the above expression, one can see how the semantic sphere of some of these terms is outlined.

> *He that maketh his house high, seeketh a downfall: and he that refuseth to learn, shall fall into evils.* (17,16).

In Greek (and in other old languages) there were established terms for the respecive notions, just as there were established terms for the man characterised by a just or unjust spirit. In Romanian one turns to derivatives, to structure loan tranlations, semantic or mixed loan tranlsations and whole sentences. The Greek *díkaios* and *adikos* become in Romanian 'the one who loves justice' and 'the one without justice', 'the one who convicts the innocent ones'.

This explains the large number of subjective sentences in the enunciative proverbs (implicative proverbs, that have as reference the human qualities):

> *He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the just shall spring up as a green leaf.* (11,28);
>
> *He that loveth correction, loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof, is foolish.* (12,1) so on and so forth.

We add to these the subjective structures requested by the impersonal verb *trebuie (must)* or by the impersonal verbal expressions that customary form into main clauses of the subjective subordinate clauses: *it is right, it isn't right, it is (not) proper, it is proper...*[2] Or, in general enunciations of ethical norm, such verbs are self-imposed. In this respect, Romanian is heir to Latin that has manifold such expressions of 'necessity' etc. - (*opus est, necesse est*), Greek is more flexible, since it lays out several possibilities of expressing the impersonal, and the Slavonic languages are characterised by 'personalisation' of the impersonal, in the sense that the verbs of the type *a trebui*[3] have normal flexion, reflected sometimes in incorrect Romanian correspondences (eu trebuiesc, tu trebuieşti etc.). In the texts we have selected we do not find many examples of this type of subjectives (that are entitled in the normative grammar textbooks 'type b subjectives'), maybe because we have

[2] Cf. Ecaterina Teodorescu, *Propoziţia subiectivă,* Bucureşti, E.Ş., 1972.

[3] The translation for 'a trebui' in English is 'must' or 'have to', but, with these verbs, the case is not proved since these verbs are not impersonal in English ('I must', 'I have to'). Therefore we shall take the example of another verb to prove out case, for instance 'to rain' (*a ploua*), which is impersonal in English, and we cannot have 'I rain'.

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replaced the consecutive translations in the intermediary languages and in the diverse stages of the Romanian language with other formula in view of the difficulty of the translation:

*It is no good thing to do hurt to the just: nor to strike the prince, who judgeth right.* (17,26).

We must however add immediately that the translators' choice was determined by the fact that in Romanian there were already very many popular proverbs built with subjective subordinates.[4]

a) *Cine poate oase roade, cine nu, nici carne moale.(He who can, chews even bones, he who cannot, chews not as much soft meat.)*

*Cine caută nevastă fără cusur, neînsurat rămâne.(He who looks for a flawless wife, remains unmarried.)*

*Cine caută vreme, pierde vreme.(He who looks for time, wastes time)*

b) *Trebuie să dai câteodată o lumânare şi dracului. (Sometimes you have to give the devil a candle.)*

*Trebuie să mănânci un car de sare cu cineva ca să-l cunoşti bine. (You have to eat a cart of salt with someone in order to get to know him better.)*

*E mai bine să fie cineva la colţ de ţară şi la mijloc de masă.(It is better to have someone at the corner of the country and in the middle of the table.)*

The phenomenon can be explained through pragmatic analysis:

„*The denominative head"* of the subjective, namely the syntagm that denominates the being, the object etc., has to be very well highlighted, and the „communicative head" (the syntagm that informs) completes its metaphorical definition, both elements sustaining the performative act generated by the proverbs.[5]

• Among other sentences, the attributive subordinate is also frequently met, thus confirming from the perspective of our corpus as well the observation of the above-mentioned researcher. The explanation can only be that the object that is defined/described in the paremiological statement has to be emphasized through its attributes – positive or negative. When this is not possible through synthetic expression (substantivised adjective), one resorts to the analytical way – an attribute or an attributive subordinate:

*Blessed is the man [1]/ that is always fearful[2]/: but he [3]/that is hardened in mind[4]/ shall fall into evil.[3]/* (28,14).

We need to point out that we deal with determinative attributives, meaning they are absolutely necessary to the qualitative/actional underlining of the subject, as the explicative ones – suplementary by their nature – would break the rules of the paremiological statement concentration.

• We can identify in our corpus other types of subordinates as well: *conditional, concessive, temporal clauses*. Such sentences usually appear in

[4] Constantin Negreanu counts 491 such syntactic patterns of a total of 5994 Romanian popular proverbs, that is 8,20%, judging that the attributive and the subjective are the only two recurrent subordinates in the Romanian proverbial phrase (op.cit., p. 114 şi 131).

[5] S.K. Saumian, apud. Teodorescu, *op.cit*., p. 90

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atypical statements, namely in counsels formulated as proverbs, in biblical exhortations etc.:

*Where pride is, there also shall be reproach ...* (11,2);

*Thou hast found honey, eat what is sufficient for thee ...* (25,16);

*Though thou shouldst bray a fool in the mortar, as when a pestle striketh upon sodden barley, his folly would not be taken from him.* (27,22).

In such situations, the statement is amplified even more, as already shown, which means that other types of subordinates can be added, like final clauses, causal clauses, etc.:

*Thou hast found honey,[1]/ eat what is sufficient for thee,[2]/ lest being glutted therewith thou vomit it up.*

The other example that is offered here is also registered in an ampler form, developed in a real rhetorical period, that we can say represents a pluralism of proverbs, if we accept as defining only the simple binary structure or, at most, the doubled one:

*When thy enemy shall fall,[1]/ be not glad[2]/, and in his ruin[3]/ let not thy heart rejoice: [4]/*

*Lest the Lord see[5]/, and it displease him,[6]/ and he turn away his wrath from him.[7]/* (24,17-18).

In all of the above-cited situations, overlappings that make the identification of the subordinate type difficult are possible. But the shading and the integration of the semantic and syntactic marks are precisely part of the expressive arsenal of the pragmatics of the paremiological text. In default of such subtle shadings, the communicative performance would be unconceivable...

***References*:**

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