

You have been cordially invited to give

THE DREADED WEDDING TOAST

Situation: You are asked to give a wedding toast in Irish. What do you do?

I. Proverbs

One route to consider is traditional sayings. I mean, there are lots of things a person *could* say in Irish, but when this sort of request is made, it's typically not because there are going to be scads of Irish speakers in attendance, but because the happy couple feels a sort of kinship with Gaelic culture. And, as we all know, culture + language = proverbs.

This approach works best if you can get away with something short. Will's suggestion:

Sláinte mhaith agus saol fada.	<i>Good health and long life. (...we're leaving off the 'bás in Éirinn' part)</i>
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Unfortunately for us, there aren't a lot of proverbs with heartfelt sentiments about the happiness inherent in the married state. Maybe the Gaelic communities didn't see much to praise about marriage. Or maybe they only remembered the funny proverbs.¹

However, if the happy couple have a wicked sense of humor, you're in luck! You could do a straight-up honest toast, mostly in English, along the lines of "when it comes to marriage the Irish don't have a lot to say in its favor, for instance [a couple hilarious examples here], so perhaps on this happy occasion I might instead offer [a) a traditional saying on companionship or b) a few proverbs that offer good advice]...."

Here are some relevant proverbs, for your consideration:

1) Topic: Marriage is the worst

Ní féasta go rósta agus ní céasta go pósta.	<i>There's no feast like a roast and no torment like marriage.</i>
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Bíonn a dteanga ina bpóca ag na mná go bpósann siad.	<i>Women keep their tongues in their pockets until they marry.</i>
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Níl aon leigheas ar an ngrá ach pósadh.	<i>The only cure for love is marriage.</i>
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Más maith leat tú a cháineadh, pós.	<i>If you want to be criticized, marry.</i>
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¹ For some reason, traditional songs tend to be a lot more flattering toward love. So maybe try telling people who make this sort of request that they'd be better off finding a singer?...

2) Topic: Marriage isn't the worst

Is folamh, fuar teach gan bean.

Empty and cold is a house without a woman.

Is uaigneach an níochán nach mbíonn léine ann.

It's a lonely washing that has no (man's) shirt in it.

Trí ghalar gan náire: Grá, tochas, agus tart.

Three diseases without shame: Love, itch and thirst.

Is fearr an t-imreas ná an t-uaigneas.

Strife is better than loneliness.

3) Topic: Community/companionship/advice

Maireann croí éadrom i bhfad.

A light heart lives long.

Giorraíonn beirt bóthar.

Two shorten the road.

Mairg nach ndéanann comhairle deá-mhná.

Woe to him who does not follow a good woman's advice.

Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireas na daoine.

People live in one another's shelter.

Ní neart go cur le chéile.

There is not strength without unity.

Is maith an scáthán súil charad.

A friend's eye is a good mirror.

An rud an líonas an tsúil líonann sé an croí.

What fills the eye fills the heart.

De réir a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin.

It takes time to build castles. ("Rome wasn't built in a day.")

Mura gcuirfidh tú san earrach ní bhainfidh tú sa bhfómhar.

If you do not sow in the spring you will not reap in the autumn.

4) Advice to the wedding guests

Leigheas na póite a hól arís.

The cure for the hangover is to drink again.

II. The Subjunctive

Perhaps you've got your heart set on a toast more along the lines of the traditional invocation of best wishes for the happy couple, a blessing like in the familiar example *Go n-éirí an bóthar leat*, "may you (sg.) succeed on your path." In that case, you'll be working with the subjunctive mood of the verb.

This is a circumstance where you can do some hunting on the internet for a sentiment you like, though as always be aware that the person who posted what you're looking at might not have much Irish as you might hope. Some examples you might use are:

Go maire sibh bhur saol nua. *May you (pl.) enjoy your new life.*

Go maire sibh chomh fada agus is mian libh, is ná raibh gátar oraibh chomh fada is a mhaireann sibh. *May you live as long as you want, and never want as long as you live.²*

Go n-éirí an t-ádh libh. *Good luck to you (pl.).*

Go dtuga Dia sláinte daoibh. *May God give you (pl.) health.*

If you're feeling precocious, perhaps you'll want to write your own. The subjunctive isn't hard to put together; we just don't usually use it much. Check your reference books for more information, but the basic rundown is this:

For Type 1 verbs, take the stem of the verb and add *-a/-e* (according to the final consonant).

For Type 2 verbs, take the stem of the verb and add *-(a)í* (according to the final consonant).

The only pronominal ending is the "we" form: *-(a)imid, -(a)imid*.

Irregular verbs are weird because that is their nature, but most of their subjunctive forms are built off the present tense stem: *faighe, ithe, taga*, and so on. Exceptions: *té* "go," *raibh* "be."

For a wish in the positive form, use *go* in front of the verb and eclipse. For a negative form, use *nár* (except for *bí* for which you say *ná raibh*) and lenite.

So, for example, the Type 1 verb *tiomáin* "drive!" is its own stem. We add *-e* and the appropriate particle so we get: *Nár thiomáine tú aon charr ach Mercedes*.

² Please note that the lovely play on words only exists in the English version. I think the English version came first, though, which would explain it.