Malapropism as a Slip of The Tongue

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Abstract:
Fatigue and quick speech can be the best causes that may lead to production of tongue slips in speech. Malapropism is taken from Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan 'The rivals' who used to produce tongue slips. The present study aims at explaining why certain words are produced instead of the intended one and to prove that the more phonologically similar a phoneme is to the replaced phoneme of a given word the more likely is the production of malapropism. It sheds lights on the main causes that lead to malaprops providing examples containing intended and replaced words In fact, slips are temporary slips for the intended word is known by the speaker but has been inadvertently replaced by another. But Mrs. Malaprop produce these slips out of ignorance. The term 'malapropism' is not misused; it was generalized to refer to the slips that the character used to produce.

 maltānī al-fuṭūḥ fī l-fālāt al-kalimat wa-‘aṭbarah mīn ‘alghālāt l-‘lāsān
al-mādrūs al-mas‘ād: shāṭy ‘nayf
jam‘at bāghād - kal‘īyāt al-tir‘a bi-l-bī‘āt
qāsm al-lu‘ūd al-‘līkīyā‘

al-khāliṣah: 

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1.1 Introduction

When we make a slip of the tongue, we mix parts of two successive words, substituting one sound for another: for example, initial consonants tend to replace each other as in; feak (for weak and feeble), but it would be most unusual to say leak and keeble, putting an end consonant in initial position. This suggests that a slip of the tongue is a slip of the phonological part of the brain. This is in fact what both of Crystal (2006:72) and Yule (1996:167) agree about. Yule (ibid.) states that some slips are not random for they are produced in accordance with a "phonological acceptable sequence" indicating existence of different stages in the articulation of linguistic expressions. Because they are errors of articulations, it is suggested that they result from 'slips of the brain' since it is the brain who organizes linguistic message not only at the phonological level but at the grammatical and semantic level which is asserted by Yule (1996:166) and Carroll (2008: 195).

1.2 Slips of The Tongue;

What are tongue slips? when do they occur? What do they indicate? The previous questions are to be answered within this section because their answers can be important in understanding the purpose of the present paper.

Tongue slips are defined by (2006:178) as 'involuntary departure from the speakers' intended production of a sequence of language units'. Sounds, syllables, words and sometimes other units of grammar can be affected by such departures. It is assumed that these forms of departures...
can be predicted by combining a number of constraints by reference to which slips can be explained. These constraints can be listed as follows:

1. The two words involved in a tongue slip (the one containing the slip and the influencing one) are within the same grammatical constructions or rhythm unit.

2. The influencing word is the strongly stressed one within the rhythm unit.

3. Most slips involve the symmetrical substitution within a syllable of one sound by another; an initial segment in the influencing word replaces the initial segment in the slipped word as in 'caked a bake' for 'baked a cake'. The following example can illustrate the points mentioned above:
The car missed the bike /but hit the wall

Where / marks a rhythm boundary and strongly stressed words are underlined, the likely slips are going to include bar for car or wit for hit. Most unlikely would be har for car (showing the influence of a less prominent word in the second rhythm unit) or lit for hit (showing a final consonant replacing an initial one).

Tongue slips tell about the more detailed neurological processes underlying speech. They provide evidence for stages recognized by models of speech production and suggest the kinds of linguistic unit that these models need to take into accounts (ibid.:178-179).

1.3 Psychological and linguistic Explanations of Tongue Slips:
The simplest explanations that can be attributed to slips is that the speaker may be talking about one thing and thinking about another at the same time, i.e. they have more than one idea at a time. This can be made clear from a look at an example said by President George Bush during 1992 campaign where he begins his remark:
I do not want run the risk of ruining what is a lovely recession(reception)(Newsweek, 1992)
It seems that the president was preoccupied with the recession and its effect on the campaign.

In fact, there are authors and articles referring to what is called "Freudian Slips" which seem to reveal hidden or repressed motivations (Steinberg, 1989:304). Freud (1963:44) argues that slips "arise from the concurrent action—or perhaps rather, the mutual opposing action of two different intentions." For example, a jealous woman may greet another whom she considers a rival saying "I'm glad to beat you" instead of I am glad to meet you".

Psycholinguistic or linguistic explanation can be viewed from the way language is produced. Speakers have plans for what they want to say. A plan consists of planning units, linguistic units, grammatical, phonological and semantic units. The idea is clear in the mind but the articulatory mechanism does not cooperate with the cognitive mechanism (plan). When this happens, a slip is resulted. The idea is right but the expression comes out wrong while speakers are unaware of their errors. The reason for this is that in the language of mind; whatever it may be the idea is right, even though the idea is inadvertently wrong (Fodor, 1975) cited in Steinberg (1998:305).

There is another suggestion illustrating the fact that slips may be made attributed to one of the explanations mentioned previously. They could be the result of hidden feelings or the existence, which is very common and logic, of competing words similar in sounds and stored with the planning unit. This in fact is asserted by Pervine (1993:79) who claims that some slips appear to be the result of slips in attention or errors due to competing choice of words, (this is not because the speaker may be thinking of another idea which seems to be similar to the intended one, in spite of the fact that there may be unconscious meaning for some slips. He (ibid.) quotes "While some slips of the tongue may represent merely a confusion among choice of words, other seems to illustrate Freud's suggestion that slips express hidden wishes.
1.4 Malapropism Concept as a Tongue Slip:

Malapropism is a confused use of words in which an appropriate word is replaced by one with similar sound but ridiculously in appropriate meaning (Hart, et al.; 2003: 803) another definition stated by Mish (2001: 702) is "a humorous misuse or distortion of a word or a phrase, especially, the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended but ludicrously wrong in context". From the above mentioned definitions, it is clear that the replacement of one word for another results in distortion of words. There is a case where the such replacement does not result in that distortion. Such a case is called 'mini malapropism'. The replaced word is a one that is somehow similar in meaning or they can be considered as synonyms; as in:

- Please, daddy, can I have an ice-cream toilet (cornet).
- At school, we have a concussion (percussion) band.
- We parked our car in a naughty story (multi-storey) can park.
- Mummy, why have you got so many burrows on your forehead?

(Aitchison; 1994: 189)

Vitevitch (1996: 2 int.) seems to combine the concepts of the two kinds in the following quotation "it is a whole word that supplants an intended word. The words that are connected in malapropism are related to each other in the way they sound, but they are not related completely "in meaning". For example, illegitimate instead of illiterate and monotony instead of ananomy.

1.4 The data and Analysis (Types of Malapropism considered in this Paper)

Following Bolshakov and Gelbukh (2003: 5), the researcher considers two types of real word errors considered as malapropisms; they are as follows:

1. Violation of linguistic knowledge: The word used in text is semantically distant from the intended word, so it becomes
semantically incompatible with context, violating linguistic knowledge of two types. The first type of errors concerns the collocations compatibility; as in:

1. The salmon swims up stream to spoon.
2. Take it for granite.
3. The bowels are pronounced distinctly.
4. She has very loose vowels.
5. They wear turbines on the head.
6. This is an ingenuous machine of peeling banana.
7. Quite affordable germs were proposed.
8. We study dielectric materialism.
9. Children have equal excess to school.
10. This is the hysterical (historical) center.
11. The kinds of Greek columns are Corinthian, Doric, and Ironic

The second type Word Net –type semantic links:
- The four seasons (for seasoning) are salts, pepper, and mustard.
- The habitants of Moscow are called Muscovites (for Muscovites).

The intended word seasoning is a hyperonym to salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar, whereas Muscovites is a semantic derivative of Moscow. It is believed that these examples lie within the concept of minimalapropism.

2. Violation of extra-linguistic knowledge: in this case the substitute general knowledge about the world:
1. The man is a real knight, a regular Don Coyote (for Don Quixote).
2. He studies in Tornato, England (for Canada).
3. In Nineteenth century pheasants (for peasants) led a terrible life.

In the second case, the substitute contradicts common sense reasoning:

4. lead the way and we will precede you (proceed).
5. His mother died in infancy (for youth).
6. Handel was half (partially) German, half Italian, and half English.

Every human knows that if somebody follows a leader in this way, he will proceed the leader (example 4); if a female died in infancy; she had
no children (example 5); no dividable entity can have three halves (example 6).

In the data analysis below, the researcher considers only malapropisms of the first category—with the violation of linguistic knowledge.

1.5.1 Data Analysis:

A look at the selected corpus of malapropism examples leads to a specific classification of the cases, conditions, causes and sound feature that lead to malapropism in speech. The most common ones are:

1. Replacement; this means to produce one phoneme instead of another due to the fact that both alternatives may be the same with respect to their place and manner of articulation, or because of the similarity between the preceding and the following suffix. It is clear that such type of malapropism slips can be evident in the replacement of consonant for vowels or vice versa. Let us consider the third and the fourth example in the corpus:

   The bowels (for vowels) are pronounced distinctly.
   She has very loose vowels.

   The two replaced phonemes are to be pronounced by the participation of the lips as in /p/ which is bilabial on the one hand. On the other hand, the lips participate in the production of /v/ as the lower teeth articulates with the upper lips. The vital role of the lips in the production of both phonemes results in the replacement of one for the other while producing similar words, as in:

   Her father was a civil serpent (for servant).

   The second case evident in the data is the replacement of /dʒ/ for /t/ as in the following example:

   Quite affordable germs (for terms) were proposed.

   In the above example, an affricate /dʒ/ replaces the alveolar /t/ which is articulated by making the blade and sometimes the tip of the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge. In contrast, the affricate /dʒ/ is produced by a complete closure at some location in the mouth and
rising the soft palate. It is clear in this example that there is no similarity in the way these two phonemes are articulated. Thus, it can be concluded that the main cause for the occurrence of such type of replacement malapropism is the fact that their last syllables are the same.

Another case is clear in minimal pairs as important units, because they distinguish between meanings of pairs as in the following example:

Children have equal excess (for access) to school.

What leads to the occurrence of such replacement is found in the distinction between the primary and secondary cardinal vowels based on lip position. The two phonemes /i/ and /ǽ/ are primary unrounded vowels. It is suggested the idea of lip position may have sprung to the brain of the speaker resulting in such replacement. The same is true for the following example:

They wear turbines (for turbans) on the head

The example

This is a hysterical (for historical) centre

shows a replacement of /i/ for /o/. The slip here is in the position of the lip position not in the tongue for the main mistake lies in making the lip rounded which means it is the slip of the phonological part of the brain, i.e., a slip in the order sent by the brain to the lip.

The second case for the occurrence of malapropism is INSERTION; some slips are produced as a result of inserting a phoneme. This case occurs when a speaker inserts a certain phoneme in a word. This would result in a word resembles the intended one of its syllables, as in:

The kinds of Greek columns are Corinthian, Doric, and Ironic (for Ionic)

In the above mentioned example, the case of the insertion is clear. This case is similar to the case where an intrusive /r/ is sometimes used in pronunciation. It is not a case of the /r/ only. All phonemes can be inserted in cases where malapropism can result. An example of this is as follows:
The desert was activated by irritation (for irrigation).
The third case of malapropism occurrence is ADDITION: this is referred to as word net semantic links, as in the following examples:
The four seasons (for seasoning) are salts, pepper, mustard, and vinegar.

Once again the only explanation for the occurrence of such slip is the similarity of the preceding or the following syllables. The intended word for the above example is a hyponymy to salt, pepper and vinegar.

The last case of malapropism slip occurrence is where both replacement and insertion work together to form the resulting word. The following example can best describe this case:
The inhabitants of Moscow are called Mosquitoes (for Moscow).

Here muscovites is a semantic derivative of Moscow. This may be the cause that has affected the production of the intended word and resulted in the production of the semantic derivative of the intended word.

1.5 Conclusion
A look at the present paper shows several points to be considered as a concluding remarks: they can be listed as follows:
1. What is referred to as slips of the tongue are originally slips of the phonological part of the brain. Slips of this kind are the result of a slip in the order sent by the brain to the organs of the speech which results in errors in speech production. The main cause for this is either psychological, like irritation and fatigue.
2. The term "malapropism" is generalized from its main concept as speech errors produced out of ignorance to include all speech errors whether intended for humorous effect or as a result of psychological or pathological reasons.
3. The main cases of malapropism are evident in replacement, addition, and insertion.
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