

## **The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics**

**Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)**

---

---

### **The Relationship Between Tongue Slips and the Field of Linguistics**

**Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)**

**English Department**

**College of Education**

**AL-Qadisaya University**

#### **1. Introduction**

Tongue slips are one kind of speech errors which are regarded mostly as errors of articulation and they can occur in everyday speech that cause comic effect. One of the most important feature of tongue slips is that they are regular and sounds, syllables, morphemes, words and even larger units of grammar can be affected. Some researchers state that tongue slips never produce acceptable sequence of language structure, while others attribute them mainly to certain basic constraints and have linguistic importance. This study sheds light on this kind of error and shows us basically its relationship with linguistic field, i.e., syntactic, semantic, and phonetic fields.

#### **2. Definition of Tongue Slips**

Slips of the tongue are a kind of memory difficulties with words and sometimes they are referred to a 'word substitution' (<http://w.word.finding.com/aboutw.f.htm>, 2006:4). Shutter (2004:3) describes tongue slips as follows:

**It is a complicated mental processing which is happening entirely below the level of consciousness, so we're not aware of doing anything except when we hear ourselves saying some-**

**thing funny, and its all happening at such lighting speed that we're not aware of any time these steps are taking.**

Sigmund Freud is the first person who pays attention to slips of the tongue as 'psychological data'. He gives the tongue slips a scientific name which is called 'parapraxes' and subsumed them to his famous hypothesis 'Freudian slips'. In his hypothesis, Freud believes that "every slip was a consequence of deeper unconscious motivations that were allowed expression through such error". A more characteristically Freudian example as he is trying to remember the name of the artist who paints the frescos of 'The Four Last Thing' in Orvieto Cathedral. He produces 'Botticelli', then 'Boltraffio' when the word he really wants is 'Signorelli' (<http://pages.slc.edu/~ebj>). Sigmund Freud is aware of the fact that everyone seems to produce such slips of the tongue and it is often the speaker tries to correct his /her error. He also claims that "tongue slips have been resulted from repressed thoughts which are revealed by the particular errors which a speaker makes " (Ibid)

In this regard, Fromkin (2006:1) indicates that "It is normal to activate a number of words in the area of the required word and suppress those which are not wanted". Sometimes when the speaker makes a slip, words are easily aroused in relation to the one is thinking about. For example, as woman read male subjects pairs of words and found many more subjects said 'fast passion' for 'past fashion', 'happy sex' for 'sappy hex' and 'bare shoulders' for 'share boulders'.

Moreover, Crystal (1987:262) states that the main linguistic finding is that tongue slips which are not random and they are regular when we speak, for example, the two words included in a

## **The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics**

**Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)**

---

tongue slip, i. e, the word that contains the slip and the word that influences it are often found within the same syntactic constituents or intonation /rhyme unit. In this respect, he adds:

**The influencing word is often the most strongly within the tone unit and most tongue slips involve the symmetrical substitution within a syllable of one sound by another, i. e, an initial segment in the influencing word replaces the initial segment in the supplied word. (Ibid. )**

### **3-Types of Tongue Slips**

Tongue slips can be classified into two categories : the major category and the secondary category. Smith (2003:1) identifies three levels of tongue slips, they are as follows:

- 1-Sound errors: These are accidental interchanges of sounds between words. Thus 'snow flurries' [sn u fl ri s] might become 'flow snurries' [fl u sn ri s].
- 2-Morpheme errors: These are accidental interchanges of morphemes between words. Thus, 'self-destruct instruction' might become 'self-instruct destruction'.
- 3-Word errors: These are accidental transposition of words. Thus, 'writing a letter to my mother' might become 'writing a mother to my letter'.

However, these three levels can be taken various forms that can be summarized as follows:

- 1-Spoonerism : It is a subtitle of sound error. It is called spoonerism after the Rev. William spooner, an Anglican clergman at Oxford University who had a nervous manner that led him to produce many slips of the tongue. Most of his slips involve the

---

interchange of two initial sounds, for example, 'long shory stort' [lo o i stort] for 'long short story' [lo o t stori] (Yule, 1996: 166). Reversal of words can also be found, for example, 'use the door to open the key' for 'use the key to open the door'. The most famous spooner's slip is 'queer old dean' [kwi uld di n] for 'dear old queen' [d uld kwi n] (<http://www.depapartments.bucknell.edu>, 2006:2)

- 2-Malapropisms: In malapropisms, over 80% of the initial sounds and over 70% of word endings are identical or very similar to the target. Malapropisms are characterized by the "Idcrous misuse of a words, especially by confusion with one of similar sounds". The term named for Mrs. malaprop, a character noted for her amusing misuse of words in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's (1775) comedy 'The Rivals' (<http://www.psych.umn.edu/courses/spring>, 2006:2). In this regard, Yule (1996:166) affirms that "our word-storage may be partially organized on the basis of some phonological information and that some words in the stone are more easily retrieved than others". However, this kind of error occurs when there is a strong similarities between the target word and the error, for example, as speakers produce 'secant', sextet', and 'sexton' for a particular type of navigational instrument 'sextant'.
- 3-Anticipation: This kind of error occurs as the initial consonant of the first word is replaced by the initial consonant of the latter word, for example, 'bake my bike' for 'take my bike' or 'a tup of tea' for 'a cup of tea'(Shutter, 2004:2).
- 4-Perseveration: This kind of error occurs when the initial consonant of the latter word is replaced by the initial consonant of the first word, for example, 'waking wabbits' for 'waking rabbits', or 'wish a brush' for 'with a brush' (Jaegar, 2006:5).

## **The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics**

**Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)**

---

---

5-Blends: This error of tongue slips refers to a fusion of two words into one. In this respect, Jaegar (Ibid. ) states that "blends are found where the words concerned mean more or less the same thing and when either word would have been appropriate ", for example :

- (terrible+horrible) → That's terrible

- (person +people) → Perple

6-Deletion: This kind of tongue slips occurs when there is a whole consonant is totally lost, for example, 'same sate' for 'same state' or 'below the gottis' for 'below the glottis' (Moser, 1991:3).

7-Consonant Shift or Movement : This kind of error occurs when the consonant in the first word moves to another word, for example, 'acon and begs' for 'bacon and eggs' or 'pitch hint' for 'pintch hit' (Crystal, 1987:263).

8-Consonant Clusters Divided : It occurs when two consonant clusters in the first word are replaced by the two consonant clusters of the second word, e. g :

Stick in the mud → smuck in the tid

(<http://www.psych.umn.edu/courses/spring>)

9-Vowel plus 'r' : It occurs when the vowel in the first word is replaced by the vowel plus 'r' in the latter word, for example, 'farlish argument ' for 'foolish argument' (Stinchfield, 1933:30).

10-Errors within Words: Tongue slips can occur within the word, for example, 'revelance ' for 'relevance' or 'whipser' for 'whisper' (Ibid. )

11-Derivational Affixes Errors: It is usually the slippers derive the word wrongly, for example, 'an intervenient node' for 'an intervening node' (Crystal, 1987:262).

12-Word substitution :The word may be replaced by another word, for example, 'before the place closes' for 'before the place opens' or 'chamber maid' for 'chamber music' (Ibid. )

However, Smith (2003:2) shows the following major different ways in which the sentence 'some swimmers sink' might fail:

Error	Type
Sim swimmers sink	Phoneme anticipation
Swum simmers sink	Phoneme shift
Some simmers sink	Phoneme deletion
Sim swummers sink	Phoneme exchange
Some summers sink	phoneme perseveration
Some swinkers sink	Cluster anticipation
Some sinkers swim	Stem exchange
Some swimmers swim	Stem perseveration or word substitution
Some swimmers drown	Word substitution

#### **4- Tongue Slip and Its relationship to Linguistics**

Speech errors are a significant contribution to our understanding of speech processing and language development. The speakers who make a slip reveal much more about the fields of linguistics. In this regard, Donovan(2006:2) affirms that slippers can not make a slip of the tongue with linguistic unit unless they have already learned that unit. Thus, it is frequently, after a slip is made, the speaker looks confused and /or corrects the wrong utterance. One advantage of tongue slips is that they can be used as a window into the mechanisms and structure of language.

## The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics

Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)

---

### 4. 1 Syntactic Slips

Tongue slips have a strong relationship to syntactic field. This relationship can be explained in the following points:

1-Tongue slips indicate that inflectional suffixes are quite often added in the course of speech, e. g

She wash upped the dishes

Or I'll forgot about en doing that

2- Morpheme Substitution is common in the speech of slippers, e. g :

'It waits to wait' → 'It waits to pay'

3- Blends is one process of word formation and it has been used by slippers in their speech. Although the resultant blend has nonsense word but the slippers have been used this process because they often combine between the first part of the first word and the last part of the latter, e. g:

- (stomach/tummy) → My stummy hurts

- (lecture/lesson) → At the end of today's lection

- (university /nursery) This is not much of universary

### 4. 2 Semantic Slips

Examining the form of tongue slips reveals the links between words in the mental lexicon. This links can be explained by seeing the following examples in Table (2) :

The Intended Utterances (The Target)	The Spoken Utterances (The Error)
He's going <u>up</u> town	He's going <u>down</u> town
All I need is something for my <u>shoulders</u>	All I need is something for my <u>elbow</u>
You have too many irons in the <u>fire</u>	You have too many irons in the <u>smoke</u>
I was <u>starving</u>	I was <u>ravenous</u>

That's a horse of another <u>color</u>	That's a horse of another <u>race</u>
On the <u>coach</u>	On the <u>sofa</u>
On the <u>pier</u>	On the <u>dock</u>

So, we find that it isn't any word that's substituted but one that is related in meaning. Antonym substitution can occur, for example the word 'up' for 'down' and ' synonym substitution also occurs, for example, the word 'starving' for 'ravenous'. Nouns are substituted for nouns like 'race' for 'color', verbs for verbs like 'starving' for 'ravenous', and 'adverbs' for 'adverbs' like 'down' for 'up' . Thus even if speakers have never had a class in English grammar, they must know unconsciously what grammatical classes these words are in. Besides that, errors of tongue slips occur more likely between words that have similar meanings.

#### **4. 3 Phonetic slips**

The relationship between tongue slips and phonetic field can be illustrated in the following points:

1. Phonetic features have been used in the speech of slippers like voicing, nasality, and voicelessness features. The following examples are given respectively in Table (3):

The Intended Utterances (The Target)	The Spoken Utterances (The Error)
<u>B</u> ig and <u>f</u> at	<u>P</u> ig and <u>v</u> at
Cedars of le <u>b</u> an <u>o</u> n	Cedars of le <u>m</u> ad <u>o</u> n
He's a <u>v</u> ile person	He's a <u>f</u> ile person

## The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics

Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)

2. Tongue slips contain syllables that obey the structural law of syllable place such as in syllable deletion and syllable reversal, i. e, initial syllables interact with initial syllables, medial with medial, and final with final. Examples are given respectively in Table(4):

The Intended Utterances (The Target)	The Spoken Utterances (The Error)
Un <u>an</u> imity of Opinion	Unamity of Opinion
<u>S</u> tockwell and <u>S</u> chacter	<u>S</u> chachwell and <u>S</u> tocker

Besides that, phonetic slips occur commonly between the two words, i.e., the intended and spoken word that have similar sounds, e. g, 'persecuted' for 'prosecuted'.

### 5- Conclusions

In the light of the previous discussion, it has been concluded the following :

1. Tongue slips are kinds of speech problems that happen unconsciously and the speaker has a difficulty in remembering the suitable word. It is a matter of confusion with words that have similar sounds, meanings and morphemes.
2. The most common error of tongue slips is the substitution error which occurs between words that have similar sounds or meanings, i.e., similarity effect.
3. It is shown that slippers can produce acceptable sequence of language structure which has a linguistic importance. Thus, there is a strong relationship between tongue slips and linguistic field, i. e, syntactic, semantic, and phonetic fields. This relationship with each one can be summarized as follows:

- A- Syntactic slips like inflectional suffixes, morpheme substitution, and blends.
- B- Semantic slips like antonym and synonym substitution and this substitution of words occurs with the same grammatical classes of these words.
- C- Phonetic slips like voicing, nasality, and voicelessness features. Syllable deletion and syllable reversal obey the structural law of syllable place.

### **References**

- Crystal, D. (1987). The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donovan, P. (2006). Slips Mark Language Development. <http://www.buffalo.edu/reporter/vol36/articles/jaegar.html>.
- Fromkin, A. V. (2006). "slips of the Tongue : Windows to the Mind ". <http://piskoloji.fisek.com>.
- Jaegar, J. J. (2006). "Phonetic features in Young Children's slips of the Tongue ". [File://A:/Entrez%20 pubmed.htm](File://A:/Entrez%20pubmed.htm).
- Moser, D. (1991). "Slips of the Tongue". <File :/slips %20 of %20 the %20 Tongue. htm>.
- Shutter, Z. W. (2004). " Slips of the Tongue: What Errors in Speech reveal ". <http://home.blumarble.net>.
- Smith, J. D. (2003). Speech Errors /Speech production Models, and speech Pathology. <File://A:/Speech. Errors.htm>.
- Speech Errors Papers. (2006) "Words and Sounds". <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu>.
- Spoonerisms Organization. (2006). Features of Tongue Slips. <http://www.psych.umn.edu/courses/spring>.

## **The Relationship Between Tongue slips and the Field of Linguistics**

**Zaynab Abbudi Ali (M. A)**

---

---

- Stinchfield, S. M. (1933). Speech Disorders. New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd.
- The Children's Handicap Center. (2006). " What Can We Learn from Slips of the Tongue". <http://pages.sk.edu/~ebj>.
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead. (2006). "Your Memory Difficulties with Names and Words ".<http://w.wordfinding.com/about.w.f.htm>.
- Yule, G. (1996). The Study of Language. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.