

# A Cognitive Process in Second Language Acquisition through Speech Errors Analyses

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## Abstract

*Speech accidents can also be evaluated by some psychological constraints as some of the interfering effects of the producing some sounds may cause slip of tongue in the coding-encoding process. Such an error is the result of the transposing of initial sounds of two words; what's more, spoonerism as a linguistic deviation refers to the speech errors of L2 learners while it can also be related to the ones of native speakers. Especially errors in the verbal production of the L2 learners stem from some slips of tongue, which hinder the intended message as a result of some psychological conditions, and sometimes they may convey unintended humorous meaning codes. Spoonerisms of the L2 learners are tried to be explained by a psycholinguistics perspective. In this context, the linguistic conditions that sanction the slips of tongue will be explained through cognitive processes.*

**Keywords:** *Cognitive process, speech errors analyses, extroversion, introversion*

## 1. Introduction

The process of conveying thoughts through articulated speech is a very complex intact. Therefore, there have always occurred speech errors in the history of humankind. These kinds of errors are committed when the sounds are uttered in an unintended way and cause meaning loss or a different message from the intended one. According to Sturtevant (1947), 'speech error' is "unintentional linguistic innovation". Another definition comes from Boomer and Laver (1968): "A slip of the tongue ... is an involuntary deviation in performance from the speaker's current phonological, grammatical or lexical intention." Bears (1992) defines slips: "Conceptually, slips are actions that mismatch their own guiding intentions. Operationally, they may be defined as actions that are quickly recognized to be errors as soon as we become aware of them".

In fact, people try to communicate each other effectively in an error-free way. But, their wish to speak perfectly is far from reality. Several aspects must be taken into consideration while analyzing speech errors such as linguistic units and linguistic rules. Psychologists believe that speech errors may occur in a speech environment that is probably affected by speaker's psychological and cognitive state. Additionally, many socio-cultural factors may play an important role in speaker's communication performance (Yang, 2002).

Spoonerisms can be defined as the words or phrases containing swapped sounds. Several studies regarded many types of spoonerisms (tongue slips) and language games have the more eye catching one are from different scholars. Speech errors may be phonological, lexical, or grammatical, or they may be errors against social appropriateness (Nooteboom, 2005).

Speech errors have traditionally been used to provide evidence for models of speech production that utilize the constructs of linguistic theory as psychologically real components of linguistic performance (e.g., Levelt, 1989 cited in Frisch and Wright, 2002). In fact, one may be prone to commit errors in speech both in mother tongue or target language. In this paper, we tried to explain the speech errors or slips of tongues connected with some psychological conditions in second language learning

## **2.Literature Review**

In this section, some of the studies dominated in this field are mentioned from different perspectives

### **Linguistic perspective of speech errors**

The concern of this classification is to understand the occurrence of the speech errors in appearance. Actually, syntax of a sentence is usually preserved almost in all kinds of speech errors.

What may be intended is about the misused with the changes of the sounds in a word or between two words or omissions of the sounds of a unit. It may be understood from the literature review of linguistic perspective of speech errors; speech errors do not occur randomly, the occurrence of speech errors follow a way of rules (Fromkin, 1968). Speech errors often occur when there are repeated sounds in the unit (MacKay, 1970).

For example: *irreplaceable* → *irrepraceable* (Fromkin, 1973).

Fromkin (1973) advocates that speech error has been studied in the history of linguistic to understand the mechanisms of speech production process such as studies from Lashley, 1951; Boomer and Laver, 1968; MacKay, 1969, 1970; Hockett, 1967; Fromkin, 1968; Nootebom, 1969. Boomer and Laver (1968) classify speech errors as disordering of units in the string, omission of a unit and replacement of a unit. Fromkin (1973) explains that according to Boomer and Laver the units so disordered, omitted, or replaced may be segments, morphemes or words.

The choice of the word in the process of conveying the thoughts is of great importance both for the meaning and grammatical rules. According to the findings of Nooteboom (1969), a mistakenly selected word in speech process belongs to nearly the same word class of the intended word.

For example:

*I have some proposals to hand out* → *hang out*  
*book of sixes* → *book of twos* (Fromkin, 1973).

MacKay, Boomer and Lever, and Nooteboom (1969) study the influence of stress on errors in speech. In the study of Boomer and Laver, it is concluded that “The origin syllable and the target syllable of a slip are metrically similar, in that both are salient (stressed) or both are weak

(unstressed), with salient-salient pairings predominating” (p.7). Nooteboom supports this conclusion, stating that “ In significantly more cases than is to be expected in a random distribution the elements involved in a speech error belong to stressed syllables” (Nooteboom, 1969 cited in Fromkin, 1973). As it is seen in the example below, there is no transposition of the stress, in spite of the transposition of the words.

For example (Fromkin, 1973):

a computer in our own laboratory → a laboratory in our own computer

Spoonerisms generally draw a picture of the transposition of the linear ordering of the sounds especially the first sound of the words. Wells (1951) supports this situation with his “First Law” of tongue slips. According to this law, “A slip of the tongue is practically always a phonetically possible noise”.

For example:

*keep a tape* → *teep a kape*

*sphinx in moonlight* → *minx in spoonlight* (Fromkin, 1973).

### **Psycholinguistic perspective of speech errors**

Speaking in target language is mostly regarded by most of the learners as the main skill of a second language. Therefore, uttering sounds in target language bear in mind the potential fallacies. If so, what can be the real criteria of real speech in target language? Is it only the ability of producing sounds in target language or the ability of verbal communication with a native speaker of the target language? Probably, another answer is more acceptable for most of the learners. Besides, the fear of committing errors can be more dominant when communicating in target language especially with a native speaker. From this risky perspective, any speaker committing speech errors because of psychological and cognitive state is more probable. Therefore, one may commit errors in both mother tongue and target language.

Apart from the linguists’ speech error studies, there are also some studies, which look insight for the cognitive and psychological aspects of the errors (Reason, 1982; Bears, 1992; Garrett, 1992). The psychological state of the speaker plays a significant role in both types of verbal productions (L1 and L2). The extent of effects of psychological factors may vary in both L1 and L2 and therefore they do not affect the cognitive state of the learners at the same level. Individual differences such as extroversion and introversion, motivation, anxiety and willingness to communicate should be taken into consideration while analyzing the speech errors. Additionally, communication barriers such as lack of subject knowledge, stress and emotions can be effective on speaker’s speech performance.

Fromkin, (1971) exemplifies that errors as *cup of coffee* → *cuff of coffee* and *less young* → *less young* and these samples are believed to show that speech segments of different sizes in an utterance are organized and processed in a linear order. Such segmental errors obey structural laws (cited in Yang 2002; 69). Other errors like *pleased to meet you* → *pleased to beat you* in a job interview competition are thought to be caused by the speaker’s psychological state (Motley, 1985 cited in Yang, 2002; p.70).

Extroverts are more sociable and active people than introverts are. They are active and have many friends. Therefore, they are always risk-takers to speak with people (Eysenck & Chan, 1982 cited in Ellis, 2008). In this respect, introverts are closer to commit errors in speech since they prefer loneliness and avoid communication. Motivation can be seen as the captain of psychological factors. Speakers especially one of the second languages should be motivated to speak in target language. Lack of motivation brings stress together with higher rate of speech errors. Willingness to communicate (WTC) can be defined as the intention to communicate. That is, speaker's unwillingness to communicate occurs in an unplanned context. When it is thought that speech errors are generally committed unintentionally and unplanned manner, lack of WTC can cause problems in communication. Most of the people fear speaking in front of society. People start to sweat and tremble when it is time to say something to the people they do not know. What is more, they can forget what they will talk about. The main reason of this undesired situation is of course anxiety. High level of anxiety and stress can end in speech errors and change the meaning unintentionally as in the example *pleased to meet you* → *pleased to beat you* in a job interview.

Brown&Yule (1983) talks about “communicative stress” drawing an outline including 3 main factors- features of the context (the listener and the situation), state of the knowledge of the listener (the language and information) and type of task (status of knowledge and structure of the task). These factors have the speaker feel worried and give rise to speech errors. Speaker feels more comfortable if the listener is one of his peers or ‘junior’ to him and talks to one listener than to many. If the environment is familiar to the speaker, it is easier for the speaker to communicate. When one is talking about a subject who is not known in detail by the listener, speaker gets stressed to explain it and transmit the message to the listener. These factors have the speaker feel worried and give rise to speech errors. Regarding speech errors in L1 and L2, the following questions may be addressed: Which situations and conditions are effective in speech errors in both first language and second language? Communication barriers, speaker's unawareness of grammatical and phonological rules, individual learner differences, and psychological conditions state of the speaker and communication stress can all play a role on the performance of speech errors. But their effect on L1 and L2 speech can be different. Speakers may commit speech errors in native language because of personality differences and psychological factors rather than unawareness of language rules.

### **3. Conclusion and discussion**

Speech errors have been mainly discussed within the frame of linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. Speech errors may be committed in both mother tongue and second language. We have tried to find answers to the question which factors are more effective on speech errors committed in both languages with the help of literature review (see references). Some linguists such as Fromkin (1973), Nooteboom (2005) etc. study speech errors from the perspective of language rules. Psycholinguists such as Garrett (1992), Reason (1982) etc. study these errors to understand the psychological and cognitive nature of the errors. Apart from these studies, socio-cultural perspectives (Yang, 2002) have been developed to understand speech errors. Additionally, the effect of L1 on L2 may be taken into consideration while studying speech errors. Speech errors may be discussed by analyzing the errors in detail within the perspective of communication stress (Brown&Yule, 1983) and individual learner differences. The effects of personality factors may be more comprehensible in the light of further studies.

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