Accepting our mistakes: How variation completes the linguistic puzzle

Donnerstag, 05.03.2020 11:45–12:45 ESA1 HG HS K

Lara Schwarz (Invited Talk)
Technische Universität Dortmund
lara.schwarz@tu-dortmund.de

The goal of this talk is to reframe how linguists view speech errors, and to introduce Gradient Symbolic Computation (GSC: Smolensky et al. 2014) as a framework that can accommodate variation in linguistic output, including deviant utterances as a part of the whole working grammar.

Every speaker has multiple options to express an idea. Sometimes, speakers produce an unintentional utterance that deviates from the standard language. For instance (1) is a speech error known as a *blend*. While nonsensical in its own right, it blends two well-formed responses "It really is" and "Very" to the hypothetical question "Isn't this lovely?"

(1) It very is (Fromkins 2002, #450)

Deviations such as (1) are often excluded from linguistic analysis, or glossed over as an outlier. However, "unintentional deviations from what we attempt to produce … provide a window into the tacit knowledge underlying speech (Goldrick 2011: 397)." Meringer and Mayer (1895) acknowledged that and produced one of the first psycholinguistic studies centered around speech errors, by collecting and analyzing slips of the tongue as evidence of the language production process.

More recently, Goldrick et al. (GPS, 2016) drew attention to doubling in codeswitching corpora. Using the example utterance (2), GPS develop an analysis in GSC and claim that this rare code-switch is a probable output from the grammar.

(2) they gave me a research grant *koḍutaa* (Sankoff et al. 1990: 93)
they gave me a research grant gave.3.PL.PAST
'They gave me a research grant'

GPS's analysis of doubling criticized regarding whether or not doubling is actually a codeswitching phenomenon or if it is a "performance error" or a result of "misfiring" during the production process (Deuchar & Biberauer 2016: 881).

The question central to this talk is: why must there be a distinction between performance errors, misfires and rare linguistic phenomenon? Is there a way to embrace all linguistic output and fit all of the pieces into the puzzle?

References: Deuchar, M. & Biberauer, T. (2016). Doubling: an error or an illusion?. Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 19(5), 881–882. Fromkins Speech Error Database. (2002, November 8). Retrieved December 12, 2019, from https://www.mpi.nl/dbmpi/sedb/sperco_form4.pl. Goldrick, M. (2011). Linking speech errors and generative phonological theory. Language and Linguistics Compass, 5(6), 397–412. Goldrick, M., Putnam, M. & Schwarz, L. (2016). Coactivation in bilingual grammars: A computational account of code mixing. Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 19(5), 857–876. Meringer, R. & Mayer, C. (1895). Versprechen und Verlesen: Eine Psychologisch-linguistische Studie. Stuttgart: Göschensche Verlagsbuchhandlung. Sankoff, D., Poplack, S. & Vanniarajan, S. (1990). The case of the nonce loan in Tamil. Language variation and change, 2(1), 71–101. Smolensky, P., Goldrick, M. & Mathis, D. (2014). Optimization and quantization in gradient symbol systems: a framework for integrating the continuous and the discrete in cognition. Cognitive science, 38(6), 1102–1138.