A Pragmatic Analysis to Instantaneous Errors in Some American Political Speeches

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**ABSTRACT**

The major purpose of this research study is to spotlight the personal and psychological hallmarks of President George Bush’s character by investigating his speech errors and disfluencies in some of his instantaneous speeches. Bush’s personality has been subjected to this investigation. He was an excessively debatable president, having achieved the worst rating twice in 2007 and the best approval rating immediately after the terrorist September 11 assaults (Abdulala & Abuslema, 2020). Further, his speech errors surpassed those of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. To attain the goal of this research study, a psycho-pragmatic theoretical framework was embraced. The basic findings of this research study can be outlined in the following points. (a) The economical employment of speech disfluencies proved that that Bush had a tendency of impudence; it explicated the catastrophic decisions he had taken during his presidency. (b) The morph-phonological errors uncovered how much bewilderment and blurring Bush had undergone during his first and second terms of presidency. (c) Bush’s slips showed that he was not an open person as he kept many thoughts more than he showed. (d) The syntactic slips revealed Bush’s highly infirm language competence, the issue that uncovered a low degree of insight and competence.

**Keywords:** speech errors, Freudian Slips, instantaneousness, psycho-pragmatic analysis

1. Introduction

President George Bush (the son) (2001 to 2009) extradited much quibble and panegyric during his first and second presidential terms. Many researchers such as Abel (2007), Akram (2013), Bonnefille (2008), Pfiffner (2004), Rodriguez (2006) and Abdulala and Abuaslema (2020) asserted that Bush endeavoured to portray himself as a leader who promoted ethics and morals while trying to protect democracy and freedom in his country from terrorism. Others, such as Garnham (2013), Greene (2006), Kushner and Gershkov (2005), pointed out that Bush was a furtive liar, who sought to set a rigid rapport between September 11 attacks and the late Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. In addition to his sly skills, Woodward (2009), Keen and Hamilton (2004), Nelson (2017), and Long (2009), asserted that Bush was a leader with a tendency for action rather than consultation and conferment. The contrasted views about Bush’s presidential performance raised the researcher’s curiosity to reveal the aspects of Bush’s character from a pragma-psychological spectacle, employing a psycho-pragmatic gadget (i.e. the instantaneous speech errors).
2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review
For Rudalavice (2006), Porter (2010), Yuyun (2014), Nelson (2017) and Abdulaal and Abuslema (2020), Bush tended to use some linguistic strategies of apprehension, awe and persuasion to persuade the American citizens that they should battle terrorists inside and outside the United States. The implication was that they had to accept the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition to the linguistic strategies of persuasion and awe, Bush used to employ parallel linguistic structures to rectify the counterfeited image that mental image embraced by the Chinese authorities about the American leaders and citizens (Pu 2007; Sbastian,2009; Sofyan & Zifan, 2019; Abdulaal & Abuslema, 2020). The third aspect of Bush’s speech was the employment of the narrative constructions to portray himself as the hero and savour who could put an end to terrorism in the world (Bonnefille, 2008; Tecce, 2008; Wainwright, 2010). The narrative constructions in Bush’s speeches were accompanied with initial repetitive structures (i.e. anaphors) accompanied with many religious references (Woodward, 2009). A fourth aspect noticed in Bush’s instantaneous speeches was the usage of the ideologically suggestive co-placement (Rodriguez, 2006; Kushner & Gershoff, 2005). That is, President Bush tended to set a rapport between two totally unrelated objects via locating them within the same clause, phrase or sentence.

3. Research Methodology
In this study, the researcher adopted a mixed research design (i.e. quantitative and qualitative designs). The qualitative exploratory analysis was used to investigate the non-numerical data collected, which included some speeches delivered in different settings. The quantitative analysis was embraced to enumerate and categorize Bush’s errors into linguistic groups (e.g. cognitive, morph-phonological, syntactic, and semantic).

4. Research Questions
The researcher endeavoured to investigate Bush’s instantaneous errors to highlight the psychological hallmarks of Bush’s personality. To attain this goal, the researcher tried to answer the following questions.
1. Pragmatically, what are the possible psycholinguistic explanations of Bush’s slips?
2. Psychologically, what can speech slips uncover about Bush’s personality?
3. What are the basic types of errors produced in Bush’s instantaneous utterances?

5. Research Results and Discussion
1. “If you want to build a big project and you can’t get insurance because of what the terrorists have done for America, you can put the project aside” (Bush, 2003)
   In 2003, Bush delivered a long spontaneous speech on the influence of terrorist attacks on the US and world economy. He contended that the American citizens should ponder on what terrorist attacks had achieved to America. Maybe he was speculating over the fact that the US would shortly control Iraqi oil.

2. “There – it’s – you know, one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror. I believe it. As I told you, Osama bin Laden believes it” (Bush, 2006).
   In an interview on CBS, Bush unconsciously and without thinking said that he failed to find a link between Saddam Hussein and September 11 attacks. This Freudian slip implied that the war launched against Iraq was groundless and was for the sake of Iraqi oil, as many politicians declared then.

3. “If the terriers and bariffs are torn down; this economy will grow.” (Bush, 2002)
   In 2002, Bush presented his plan to push the American economy ahead. He announced that he would activate some free trade agreements with Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco. Further, he said that he would terminate the barriers and tariffs between the US and many other countries. However, he made a spoonerism by saying “terriers and bariffs” instead of saying “tariffs and barriers”.

4. “I don’t have to accept their tenants. I was trying to convince those college students to accept my tenants. (Bush, 2000)
   In the excerpt in (4) above, Bush pointed out that his speech at Bob Jones University was utterly misunderstood and decontextualized. He declared that his last visit to Bob Jones University did not mean that he held their tenets (i.e. principles and beliefs). However, he made a malapropism by saying “tenants” instead of “tenets”.

5. “And I’m really pleased with the organization and the thousands of South Carolinians that worked on my behalf. And I’m very gracious and humbled.” (Bush, 2000)
   In 2000, Bush scored a sweeping victory over McCain in Carolina. He thanked the head of his presidential campaign in Carolina, Mary Roberts. But he made a malapropism by saying that he was “gracious” to the head of his presidential campaign instead of saying that he was “grateful”.

6. “Rarely is the question asked: Are our children learning?” (George Bush, 2004)
   The quote above marked the emergence of the linguistic concept of Bushism. In his presidential campaign, Bush delivered a speech in Florence in which he wondered if the American children received the proper education.
The lack of subject-verb agreement between the subject (i.e. children) and the verb (i.e. is) attracted the attention of the attendees.

7. "We can have filters on the internets where public money is spent." (Bush, 2000)

In one of his presidential debates, Bush asserted that he was very much concerned about the sweeping spread of sexually explicit films among American youngsters. Bush declared that this predicament could have been encountered if the authorities imposed filters on the internet. None the less, he grammatically slipped by adding the plural morpheme "s" to the uncountable noun (i.e. internet).

8. "Afghanistan is the most daring and ambition mission in the history of NATO." (Bush, 2008)

In his first meeting with the NATO leaders, Bush portrayed NATO’s mission in Afghanistan as an ambitious task. None the less, he mistakenly used the noun "ambition" rather than the adjective "ambitious".

9. "As of yesterday's positive report card shows, children do learn when standards are high, and results are measured" (Bush, 2007)

Hedged by some public school children, Bush boasted about the hit he achieved in the educational fields. However, Bush made a syntactic blooper by adding the plural morpheme 's' to an irregular plural lexical item.

10.1 "There’s a lot of good people — there’s a lot of good people, a lot of good people who wear the uniform at the local level, working hard to secure the homeland. A lot of good firefighters and EMS and police officers spend a lot of time, a lot of time worrying about you and your health" (Bush, 2002).

10.2 "You'll hear, we're going to spend -- the government is going to spend the government money here, and the government is going to spend the government here." (Bush, 2002)

10.3 "I know what I believe. I will continue to articulate what I believe and what I believe I believe what I believe is right" (Bush, 2001)

In one of his spontaneous speeches to the American people in 2002, Bush informed the American citizens about the challenges that the US was encountering. He suggested enacting Homeland Security Department. None the less, in his speech, many adjective and adverb phrases and noun clauses were unnecessarily reiterated more than once in the same sentence. (See 10.1, 10.2 & 10.3)

11. “If you don’t stand for anything, you don’t stand for anything! If you don’t stand for something, you don’t stand for anything.” (Bush, 2004)

At Bellevue Community University, Bush explicated the reforms he introduced to the security system. By the end of his statement, he contended that a man who used to stand for nothing would certainly fall for anything. In other words, one’s robust morals and values prevent them from embracing wrong beliefs. However, Bush reiterated what he stated twice using totally different lexical items (i.e. tautology).

12. “Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we" (Bush, 2004)

In 2004, in a press conference with one of his military aides, Bush declared that he signed a new law to raise the military budget by 3.5 percent. However, Bush committed an out - of - context slip as he deviated from the already prepared text. The added clause implied that his government would not halt thinking of ways to harm the American economy.

6. Conclusions

The errors made by Bush in his previously analyzed speeches can be categorized into 5 groups: Freudian slips, phonological errors, morphological errors, syntactic errors, and semantic errors. Freudian slips are intrusions of unwanted thoughts; they are the most recurrent type of errors noticed in Bush’s speeches. They are usually attributed to some psycho-physiological problems, such as fatigue, strong associations, or preoccupation. Phonological errors were basically spoonerisms (i.e. segment switching), perseverations (i.e. replacing an earlier syllable with a later one), and syllable substitution. The morphological errors were basically malapropisms (i.e. replacing a lexical item with another that has identical phonemes but disadvantageous meaning). Morph-Phonological errors are attributed to a priming process (i.e. an implicit memory effect). The agreement asymmetry was the most notable syntactic error in Bush’s speeches. These syntactic errors may be attributed to poor competence rather than performance. As for semantic errors, they were substantially repetitions, tautologies, and out-of-context errors. These error types were attributed to the incorrect crystallization of the ideas resulted from fatigue or distraction. The linguistic errors made by Bush uncovered many aspects of his personality. First, the phonological and morphological errors showed how much perplexity and pressure Bush experienced. Second, Bush’s Freudian slips revealed the fact that he was not an outspoken president as he repressed many thoughts and feelings more than he showed. Third, Bush’s syntactic errors revealed not only his poor linguistic competence but also his below moderate intelligence.
Acknowledgments
I take this opportunity to thank Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia alongside its Deanship of Scientific Research for all technical support it has provided towards the fulfilment of the current research

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