



ESL Podcast 1020 – Making Verbal Mistakes

GLOSSARY

verbal – oral; with spoken words, not written words

* The judge asked the witness to provide verbal responses instead of just nodding or shaking her head.

to mispronounce – to say something incorrectly, using the wrong sounds, especially when saying aloud an unfamiliar word

* It bothers Mr. Schlukebier that people almost always mispronounce his name.

for one – for example; for instance; a phrase used when one is stating one of many possible things

* We have many reasons for wanting to expand, like the potential growth in profits, for one.

to stumble over – to do something poorly, especially when speaking in an unclear or confusing manner

* Sheila stumbled over her opening remarks, but then she relaxed and appeared more confident throughout the rest of the presentation.

delivery – the way in which one presents information, especially orally

* When people use too many hand gestures, it can be a distraction from the rest of their delivery.

to put it lightly – to state something more mildly, gently, or kindly than one could; to understate something

* Ahmed said his garage was disorganized, but that was putting it lightly. It's a complete mess!

to stutter – to involuntarily and uncontrollably repeat the first sound of words many times, making it difficult to communicate

* Melanie often stutters when she gets nervous, so she's seeing a speech therapist for help.

verbiage – words that are spoken or printed, especially when the words are verbose (using too many words) or technical

* The editor is helping us reduce the verbiage to fit everything on one page.

tongue twister – a phrase or poem that is difficult to say, usually because the words have similar sounds

* One of Harold's favorite tongue twisters is "She sells seashells on the seashore."



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to have (something) down cold – to understand something very well, be very familiar with it, and/or have something memorized perfectly

* Jasnery has practiced her acceptance speech more than 100 times, so she has it down cold.

slip of the tongue – a misstatement; an instance in which one accidentally says the wrong thing or says something incorrectly

* I can't believe I called him by the wrong name during an interview. What a horrible time for a slip of the tongue!

Freudian slip – a mistake while speaking that shows what one was really thinking about, especially if it's sexual

* Instead of saying, "I'm so glad to see you," she said, "I'm so mad to see you." I guess that was a Freudian slip.

(one's) bread and butter – the way one earns a living; the main part of one's business; the main way in which one makes money

* Sometimes he sells paintings, but selling insurance policies are his bread and butter.

flub – a minor mistake or error, especially while speaking

* That number seems way too high. Maybe it was just a flub in her presentation

(one's) mind was elsewhere – a phrase meaning that someone was distracted and was thinking about something else, or that one was not focused on and paying attention to something

* The student's mind was elsewhere, so he wasn't prepared to answer the teacher's question when she called on him.

blooper reel – a short, funny video that shows the mistakes people made while a movie or TV show was being filmed

* The blooper reel shows a kissing scene that was interrupted when the car alarm started going off.

outtake – segments of video that were filmed, but were not included in the final product

* Lisa was really disappointed when her only speaking lines in the movie became part of the outtakes.

footage – recorded video for a movie or TV show

* Detectives are analyzing footage from security cameras to try to identify the bank robber.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Omar mean when he says that some of the text “was written like tongue twisters”?
 - a) The text contained a lot of typos and other errors.
 - b) The text was very difficult to read aloud.
 - c) The text had a lot of funny, but rude jokes.
 2. What happens when a presenter makes a slip of the tongue?
 - a) The presenter sticks out his or her tongue.
 - b) The presenter accidentally spits at the audience.
 - c) The presenter says something incorrectly.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

delivery

The word “delivery,” in this podcast, means the way in which one presents information, especially orally: “Shane could improve his delivery by speaking more slowly.” When talking about purchases, “delivery” is the service of someone bringing the purchase to one’s home or business: “Does the purchase price of a mattress include delivery?” Or, “The pizza shop promises delivery within 40 minutes, or the pizza is free.” The phrase “to pay cash on delivery” means to pay for something when it is delivered: “All our sales require that the customers pay cash on delivery, so we never have to worry about unpaid invoices.” Finally, when talking about medicine, “delivery” means childbirth, especially the moment when the baby leaves the mother’s body: “As an obstetrician, how many deliveries do you do in a typical week?”

to have (something) down cold

In this podcast, the phrase “to have (something) down cold” means to understand something very well, be very familiar with it, and/or have something memorized perfectly: “All students should have the multiplication tables down cold before they enter the fourth grade.” The phrase “to have a cold” means to be sick, especially coughing and sneezing: “Please don’t send your son to school if he has a cold.” The phrase “to leave (someone) out in the cold” means to not include someone, or to not invite or allow someone to participate in something: “Why did you leave me out in the cold while you went to see a movie together?” Finally, the phrase “to knock (someone) out cold” means to make someone unconscious: “Wow, that anesthesia knocked me out cold!”



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CULTURE NOTE

Malapropisms, Spoonerisms, and Mondegreens

Anyone who has done any “public speaking” (the practice of making presentations and speaking in front of groups of people) is familiar with “gaffes” (mistakes that cause embarrassment). In addition to Freudian slips and other slips of the tongue, public speakers have to “beware of” (be careful or cautious regarding) “malapropisms” and “spoonerisms.”

A “malapropism” is the use of the wrong word, accidentally replacing the desired word with one that has a similar sound, often with “humorous” (funny; making people laugh) results. For example, the former mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley, once referred to “Alcoholics Anonymous” (an organization that helps people recover from an addiction to alcohol) as “Alcoholics Unanimous,” where “unanimous” refers to a situation where all people agree on something. A more embarrassing example of a malapropism was reported in New Scientist magazine, which stated that someone described a co-worker as a “suppository” of information (a “suppository” is a medicine that is placed inside one’s body) instead of a “repository” (a place where things are stored) of information.

A “spoonerism” occurs when the speaker “switches” (changes; mixes) the sounds in two words in a phrase. For example, a spoonerism of “tons of soil” (meaning a lot of dirt) would be “sons of toil” (or the sons of hard, physical labor).

Finally, even if the speaker “gets things right” (does something correctly), sometimes the members of the audience mishear the phrase. These “instances” (moments when this occurs) are known as “mondegreens.” One example is from the “lyrics” (the words sung in a song) to a song called Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix. The “actual” (real) lyrics are “Excuse me while I kiss this guy,” but many people hear it as “Excuse me while I kiss the sky,” an example of a mondegreen.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 1,020 – Making Verbal Mistakes.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 1,020. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at ESLPod.com. Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/eslpod, and take a look at our ESL Podcast Blog on our website, where we give you some additional free lessons in English every week.

This episode is a dialogue between Omar and Faith about making mistakes when you peak – I mean, speak. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Omar: Ha-ha.

Faith: What's so funny?

Omar: I'm editing Paul's speech so that it can be posted on our website, but I didn't realize how many verbal mistakes he made.

Faith: Were there a lot?

Omar: Yeah, he mispronounced the last name of the manager in charge of new products, for one. He also stumbled over the name of the new products.

Faith: I did notice that he had a few problems with delivery.

Omar: That's putting it lightly. He stuttered when trying to list the products' features. It's true that some of the verbiage was written like tongue twisters, but I thought he would have had it down cold by now.

Faith: I noticed he made a few slips of the tongue, but I didn't notice all that. I guess I wasn't listening too closely. But what were you laughing about when I walked in?



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Omar: Paul made a Freudian slip. Instead of saying that “innovation is our bread and butter,” he said that it was our “bed and butter.” Maybe that’s why he had so many flubs. His mind was elsewhere.

Faith: I think you’ll have plenty of material for a blooper reel.

Omar: That’s true. In fact, if this were a film, I’d have more outtakes than usable footage!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Omar laughing. Faith asks him, “What’s so funny?” Notice, she could have said, “What’s funny?” but in this situation, it would be more common to say, “What’s so funny?” meaning “What are you laughing at? What do you think is so funny that you are laughing?”

Omar says, “I’m editing Paul’s speech so that it can be posted on our website, but I didn’t realize how many verbal mistakes he made.” The word “verbal” (verbal) means with spoken words. We might also say “oral” (oral). “Verbal” or “oral” means that you say it, not write it. So, Omar seems to be the video editor for this company, and he’s noticing a lot of mistakes in one of the videos. He’s editing a video of someone named Paul who is giving a speech.

Faith says, “Were there a lot?” meaning were there a lot of verbal mistakes. Omar says, “Yeah. He mispronounced the last name of the manager in charge of new products, for one.” “To mispronounce” is to pronounce something or say something incorrectly, using the wrong sounds. “For one” at the end of this sentence means for example, for instance. It’s a phrase we use when we are saying this is just one of many examples I could give you.

Omar says, “He mispronounced the last name of the manager in charge of” – or responsible for – “new products, for one.” The idea is that he committed other mistakes as well. Omar says, “He also stumbled over the name of the new products.” “To stumble (stumble) over” something is a phrasal verb meaning not to do very well at. “To stumble over” can also mean to be walking along and hit your foot on something and begin to fall. That is literally “to stumble over” something. Here it’s used more to mean to make a mistake, especially when you’re saying something – to have difficulty saying something.

Don’t confuse this with another phrasal verb, “to stumble on,” or “to stumble upon” (upon). That means to find something that you think is valuable or



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interesting even though you weren't actually looking for it. Omar says that poor Paul "stumbled over the name of the new products" for this company.

Faith says, "I did notice that he had a few problems with delivery." "Delivery" (delivery) here means the way that you present information. When we talk about the "delivery" of the speech, we're talking about how the speech was given – whether you used the right intonation or you made the speech interesting.

Omar says, "That's putting it lightly." Faith says that she noticed "a few problems" with Paul's delivery of his speech. Omar says it was more than a few problems. That's why he says, "That's putting it lightly." When someone says, "That's putting it lightly" (lightly), or "that's putting it mildly" (mildly), he means that you are understating the problem. You are making the problem less serious than it really is. You're perhaps being kind to this person by not indicating just how bad things were.

Omar says that Paul "stuttered when trying to list the products' features." "To stutter" (stutter) is to repeat the first sound of a word – not intentionally, but because perhaps you have some sort of difficulty in speaking, or perhaps just because you're very nervous. When someone says, "I, w-went to the s-store," that's stuttering. Paul "stuttered when trying to list," or give a list of, "the products' features" – the things that the products had or the things that the products offered.

Omar says, "It's true that some of the verbiage was written like tongue twisters, but I thought he would have had it down cold by now." There are several words and expressions there. Let's begin with "verbiage" (verbiage). "Verbiage" refers to writing or speaking that contains too many words, that is often confusing or difficult to understand because the person is using lots of different words – perhaps to confuse you or perhaps because he doesn't really know what he's saying, and so he's just saying something.

"Verbiage" might also be applied to a text or a speech that had a lot of technical terms. We're not sure which is the case here. Omar says, "It's true that some of the verbiage was written like tongue twisters." A "tongue twister" (twister) is a phrase that is difficult to say, usually because there are lots of different words that have similar sounds. These are things that sometimes children like to say as a game.

An example would be, "She sells sea shells on the seashore." If you try to say that very fast, you'll probably make a mistake in pronouncing it. The importance is not the meaning of the sentence. The sentence is about a woman who is



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selling “shells” – things that you find on the beach of an ocean – on the “seashore,” which is basically the edge of the ocean, the edge of the sea. In any case, the important thing about a tongue twister is that it’s difficult to pronounce. “Peter piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.” That’s another tongue twister, which I probably got wrong.

Anyway, Omar says that some of the speech that Paul was reading was written like tongue twisters, meaning it was difficult to pronounce or difficult to say. “But,” Omar says, “I thought he would have had it down cold by now.” “To have something down cold” means to have it memorized, to know it perfectly so that you don’t make any mistakes.

Faith then says, “I noticed he made a few slips of the tongue, but I didn’t notice all that.” Once again, Faith doesn’t think that Paul’s problems were as serious as what Omar is describing. She says, “I noticed he made a few slips (slips) of the tongue.” A “slip of the tongue” is a mistake, something you say accidentally that you didn’t mean to say. Faith says, “I guess I wasn’t listening too closely,” or very closely. “But what were you laughing about when I walked in?”

Omar says, “Paul made a Freudian slip.” A “Freudian (Freudian) slip” is a mistake that indicates what you were really thinking about – when someone says something and they say the wrong words that indicate (or at least, we think they indicate) what the person was really thinking about. “Freudian” obviously comes from the last name of the famous psychiatrist Sigmund Freud of the early twentieth century. “Paul made a Freudian slip,” according to Omar, and Omar tells us what that slip or mistake was.

Omar says, “Instead of saying that ‘innovation’ is our bread and butter,’ he said that it was our ‘bed and butter.’” So, Omar says that Paul was supposed to say the expression, or the phrase, “innovation is our bread and butter.” “Innovation” is coming up with new things. The expression “bread and butter” is actually quite common in English. It means the way that you make a living – the way that you make money to live, to survive. It may also refer to a company’s most successful product because that’s the product, the thing the company sells, that makes the most money for the company.

Omar says that Paul was supposed to say “bread and butter,” but instead says “bed (bed) and butter.” Paul says “bed” instead of “bread.” Often Freudian slips are associated with something perhaps sexual, and that’s probably why Omar calls this a Freudian slip. Maybe Omar was thinking about his bed – perhaps going to sleep – rather than the topic that he was supposed to be talking about, which was the company’s innovations.



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Omar says, “Maybe that’s why he had so many flubs. His mind was elsewhere.” A “flub” (flub) is a minor mistake, a minor error. Interestingly enough, the first movie I ever saw in a movie theater was a Disney film called Son of Flubber (flubber). A “flubber” would be someone who makes a lot of mistakes. It’s a word we don’t use that often anymore in English conversation.

I was 12 years old, by the way, when I saw my first movie in a movie theater. My parents didn’t have money to take everyone to movie theaters since there were 11 of us – 11 children in our family. Going to movie would’ve been very expensive. I actually went with a couple of friends of mine. But this is not important to our story, is it?

Omar says that Paul’s “mind was elsewhere.” When we say your mind was “elsewhere,” we mean you were distracted and were thinking about something else instead of what you should have been thinking about and focusing on. Faith says, “I think you’ll have plenty of material for a blooper reel.” A “blooper” (blooper) is similar to a flub or a slip – it’s a mistake. Usually we use this word when talking about mistakes that actors and actresses make when they are filming a movie or a television show.

A “blooper reel” is a short, funny video that shows the mistakes that someone made when he or she was speaking. Sometimes at the end of movies you’ll see a blooper reel, or on the DVD – back when people bought DVDs, which I guess soon will no longer be common – there were often blooper reels on the DVD from the movie, from the filming of the movie.

Omar says, “That’s true. In fact, if this were a film, I’d have more outtakes than usable footage.” An “outtake” (outtake) is a part of a video that was filmed, but wasn’t included in the final film or the final video – the final television show, perhaps. “Footage” (footage) just refers to the recorded video for a movie or television show. I say “video” since most things that we film nowadays are done digitally.

Of course, in the old days there used to be physical film that was in a camera, and the word “foot” was used to describe the length of the film, so “footage” would describe a part of the physical film – a part of the filming, if you will.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]



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Omar: That's true. In fact, if this were a film, I'd have more outtakes than usable footage!

[end of dialogue]

There aren't any slips or flubs in the script written by our scriptwriter, the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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