

Freudian slip

A **Freudian slip**, also called **parapraxis**, is an error in speech, memory, or physical action that occurs due to the interference of an unconscious subdued wish or internal train of thought. The concept is part of classical psychoanalysis. Classical examples involve slips of the tongue, but psychoanalytic theory also embraces misreadings, mishearings, mistypings, temporary forgettings, and the mislaying and losing of objects.

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History

The Freudian slip is named after Sigmund Freud, who, in his 1901 book *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*,^[1] described and analyzed a large number of seemingly trivial, bizarre, or nonsensical errors and slips, most notably the Signorelli parapraxis.

Freud, himself, referred to these slips as *Fehlleistungen*^[1] (meaning "faulty functions",^[1] "faulty actions" or "misperformances" in German); the Greek term *parapraxes* (plural of *parapraxis*; from Greek *παρά* (*para*), meaning 'another', and *πρᾶξις* (*praxis*), meaning 'action') was the creation of his English translator, as is the form "symptomatic action".

Freud's process of psychoanalysis is often quite lengthy and complex, as was the case with many of the dreams in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. An obstacle that faces the non-German-speaking reader is such that in original German, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's emphasis on "slips of the tongue" leads to the inclusion of a great deal of colloquial and informal material that are extremely resistant to translations.^[2]

As in the study of dreams, Freud submits his discussion with the intention of demonstrating the existence of unconscious mental processes in the healthy:

In the same way that psycho-analysis makes use of dream interpretation, it also profits by the study of the numerous little slips and mistakes which people make—symptomatic actions, as they are called [...] I have pointed out that these phenomena are not accidental, that they require more than physiological explanations, that they have a meaning and can be interpreted, and that one is justified in inferring from them the presence of restrained or repressed impulses and intentions. [Freud, *An Autobiographical Study* (1925)]

Alternative explanations

In contrast to psychoanalytic theorists, cognitive psychologists say that linguistic slips can represent a sequencing conflict in grammar production. From this perspective, slips may be due to cognitive underspecification that can take a variety of forms – inattention, incomplete sense data or insufficient knowledge. Secondly, they may be due to the existence of some locally appropriate response pattern that is strongly primed by its prior usage, recent activation or emotional change or by the situation calling conditions.^[3]

Some sentences are just susceptible to the process of banalisation: the replacement of archaic or unusual expressions with forms that are in more common use. In other words, the errors were due to strong habit substitution.^[3]

In general use, the term 'Freudian slip' has been debased to refer to any accidental slips of the tongue.^[4] Thus many examples are found in explanations and dictionaries which do not strictly fit the psychoanalytic definition.

For example: She: 'What would you like—bread and butter, or cake?' He: 'Bed and butter.'^[4]

In the above, the man may be presumed to have a sexual feeling or intention that he wished to leave unexpressed, *not* a sexual feeling or intention that was dynamically repressed. His sexual intention was therefore *secret*, rather than *subconscious*, and any 'parapraxis' would inhere in the idea that he *unconsciously wished to express that intention*, rather than in the sexual connotation of the substitution. Freudians might point out, however, that this is simply a description of what Freud and Breuer termed the preconscious which Freud defined as thoughts that are not presently conscious but can become conscious without meeting any resistance.^[5] In Freud's theory, he allows parapraxes to be generated in the preconscious,^[6] so he would allow for thoughts that one tries to put outside of consciousness to have effects on conscious actions.

See also

- Cognition
- Eggcorn
- Lapsus
- Malapropism
- Metathesis
- Pun
- Spoonerism
- Tip of the tongue

References

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- Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in Volume VI of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud p. 209-210

Sources

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External links

- *Der Mensch determiniert durch unbewusste Motivierung. Erläutert in der Psychopathologie des Alltags von S. Freud. Erläuterte kritische Zusammenfassung der Psychopathologie mit Erläuterung Freud'scher Versprecher* (German) (<http://kaltric.de/mat/matphil/freudpsychopatho>)
 - Freudian Slips (http://www.freudfile.org/psychoanalysis/freudian_slips.html). Explains what they are and offers examples of slips approached through psychoanalytic means.
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