

Phonetic and Multimodal Strategies in Humorous Malapropisms

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Abstract

Malapropisms are an under-investigated type of wordplay in the linguistic investigation of humor. Several types of humor renditions have been on the increase because individuals are now using their digital platforms for display of this creativity. Therefore, this study set out to explore the linguistic techniques in the malapropisms on one Instagram influencer's account. Chomsky and Halle's Distinctive Features Theory, Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodality theory, and McGraw and Warren's Benign Violation Theory were adopted as theoretical framework. A descriptive design was adopted for the research. A total of 200 reels were collected for the analysis and were grouped into eight based on their functions. It was discovered that, contrary to what obtains in literature, words are usually manipulated for malapropism in at least one of the following: stress pattern, word class, syllabic structure and semantics.

Keywords: malapropisms, Distinctive Features Theory, Multimodality, Benign Violation Theory, humor

1. Introduction

Humor, the quality of amusement in something that is done or said, used to be exclusively created by a closed group of people (Abbas and Dhiaa, 2016); however, this is no longer the case as smartphones and the internet have afforded everyone a level platform to create humor. Thus, there are now numerous individuals who use different social media applications like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Whatsapp to distribute their comedies (Okhuosi, 2022). Thus, there are now comedy skits, reels, updates and statuses, respectively, created by creative individuals and these are somewhat different from the regular and traditional comedies like situational comedy and stage comedy. With an increasing pervasiveness of these different novel modes, there is a budding question about who qualifies to create comedy or who deserves to be called a comedian. Although this is not the question that this study seeks to answer, it acknowledges the different

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platforms being used to create humor and opines that humor is what it is regardless of the quarters it comes from.

In the creation of humor, Gutiérrez et al. (2018) establish that the most common types of linguistic devices employed in humor are lexical and phonetic, the latter being used more than the former. Within the phonetic strategies also, such processes like elision, metathesis, substitution, over-pronunciation, homophony, similarity and addition are employed to achieve humor, homophony, being the most frequently used. However, despite the acknowledgement that phonetics is a common linguistic device used to create humor, malapropism does not reflect as a manifestation of phonetically generated humor even though it is very central to it. Thus, this study considers malapropism, being the deliberate replacement of a similarly sounding word with another, to be a form of comedy worth exploring for its phonetic qualities and its under-exploration in the literature.

Therefore, this study set out to investigate the achievement of humor through malapropisms which were created by a particular Instagram influencer. This influencer makes pancakes, inscribes malapropisms on one side of these pancakes and shares a video of them as Instagram reels. The uniqueness, rareness, creativity and style that are associated with malapropisms prompted the interest in this research. The objectives of the research are to

1. identify the instances of malapropisms in the Instagram posts from this account,
2. group these malapropisms based on their function, and
3. analyze each group for their distinctiveness, multimodality and humor

This study is significant because it provides an opportunity to appreciate creativity and ingenuity where language is concerned. It further provides more enlightenment about malapropisms as a technique for achieving humor.

2.1 Review

Montgomery (1997) describes humor as the mental ability to identify and appreciate the absurdity of a situation. Thus, while humor comes in different modes, such as textual, visual, audio or audio-visual modes, understanding it requires a mental process. The term humor has not always referred to something that engenders mirth, in fact, Abbas and Dhiaa (2016) note that between the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, the meaning of ‘humor’ went from being a term of derision to one being used to refer to a skill. They note that within the sixteenth century, humor referred to

deviation from social norms, as well as odd and absurd people who were a source of ridicule and laughter. This is not to say however, that in contemporary times, ridicule and absurdity are no longer associated with humor. They may not be all there is to humor, but they are still very much connected to what is considered to be humor. In a quest to establish the universal language of humor, Guidi (2017) states that laughing or smiling does not always mean that a person has enjoyed humor.

Abbas and Dhiaa (2016) describe humor to be any utterance or display that is considered to be funny and laughable. They identify some types of humor to be wit, sarcasm, irony, and pun, and all these generate mirth in quite different ways. Of all these identified types, arguably, pun can be said to have enjoyed the most attention in research. In line with this, Guidi (2017) states that pun is the only humor type that has been subjected to extensive research enough to arrive at a universal structure. While some scholars suggest that pun and wordplay are interchangeable terms, Giorgadze (2014) argues that they are not synonymous at all; rather, wordplay is an encapsulating term for pun—the most common sub-category, as well as others like spoonerism, malapropism, wellerism, onomatopoeia, anagram, mondegreen, oxymoron, palindrome and so on. Giorgadze (2014) also notes that pun is the most common sub-category of wordplay.

Thus, when it comes to academic research on wordplay as a form of humor, malapropisms have not enjoyed as much scholarly attention as puns. Only a few research like Chauke and Babane (2015), Basyar (2020), Estrema (2021), Nashruddin and Fiptar (2021), Poix (2021), and Gutiérrez, Jamett, Zamorano et al. (2018) have explored malapropism from the aspect of humor and language studies.

At this juncture, it is necessary to discuss the intricacies of malapropism and how it is achieved. Generally, malapropisms usually maintain their word class, stress patterns, and syllabic structures; if there were to be any change in the syllabic or stress pattern, the addition or deletion would involve an unstressed syllable (Estrema, 2021). However, Estrema's description of, and limitations on a malapropism are quite arguable because, it is not always the case that a malapropism maintains its word class or stress pattern, the only criterion is that of similarity. Estrema (2021) reveals that the word malapropism came into the English lexicon through a character in Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals*. This character, Mrs Malaprop was iconic for the misuse of words in the book. The name Malaprop itself is from the French language which means 'inappropriate' (Estrema, 2021; Miller 2017). Putting it simply therefore, malapropism is the

deliberate blundering of a word, by using it in a context where it does not fit into because it sounds similar to the one that does fit.

Ummsteinson (2017) identifies three types of malapropisms to be incidental malapropism, persistent malaprop and intentional malapropism. Incidental malapropism is simply a once in long while occurrence, while persistent malapropism, like the name suggests is a consistent occurrence. Neither incidental nor persistent malapropism is deliberate, unlike the intentional one which is deliberate and intended to create a comic effect. Thus, only persistent and incidental malapropisms are errors, while intentional malapropism is not. With these, Ummsteinson (2017) argues against the Gricean theory, showing that people can actually say what they do not mean, whether deliberately or not. However, Ummsteinson's classification of persistent malapropism seems to be the case of someone who does not realize their error. Regardless of this background though, it would still be considered to be an instance of a malapropism.

Basyar (2020) examines the use of malapropisms in the third season of the series, *Modern Family* and identifies two classes of malapropisms – classical and non-classical malapropisms (the more common one is classical malapropism). The basis for Basyar's classification of the malapropisms into these types is whether the word used is real or made-up. Thus, classical malapropism involves the use of unreal words, while non-classical malapropism involves the use of real words. However, the study does not fully explore a very salient feature in its data and this is the unintentional use of malapropisms by Gloria, a character who speaks English as a second language, and whose command of English is not as good as that of other characters.

Estrema (2021) explores malapropism, although not from a humorous perspective, but as a linguistic consequence of colonialism in the Philippines. The study submits that malapropism often occurs just before code alternation happens, and that it occurs mainly because of speakers' poor command of the English language. The linguistic plurality in this context prompts the speakers to switch from the language in which malapropism has occurred to another language in which they are more competent. Thus, Estrema rules malapropism as a sign of language incompetence in the Philippines. Although the study acknowledges the humorous dimension of malapropisms in its reviews, it does not explore this area in its analysis and final submissions at all. Instead, it dwells more on the negative perspectives of malapropisms than its humorous aspects.

A connection can inadvertently be drawn between Estrema's (2021) study and Basyar's (2020) study and this is in the area of non-native context of English use. Gloria, the character who uses malapropisms the most in *Modern Family* is a non-native speaker of English, and the case is the same with the Philippines as described in Estrema (2021). This presupposes, arguably, that malapropism occurs only in second or foreign language contexts. However, this is not always the case because a number of instances are found in former US president's speech—George Bush (Miller, 2017).

Furthermore, Nashruddin and Fiptar (2021) identify malapropisms as one of the humorous strategies deployed by a teacher of English as a Foreign Language during the virtual learning in the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other strategies, malapropism is used to elicit humor from the students and simultaneously engage them during the online classes. Only one instance of each of the strategies were identified and discussed, thus, the study is in need of more illustrations for each of the strategies.

Chauke and Babane (2015) investigate the humorous engagement of malapropism in a literary text whose title translates to *The One Who Does Not Listen*. This strategy does not impede the communicative functions of the sentences in which malapropisms occur, neither does it defame the characters, rather, it provides a view of the characters' life. It is also used as a means to ease tension among the characters in the literary work. The work claims that the malapropisms are an attempt to help readers to better understand the language; however, this is does not seem to be the case. In fact, it is the submission of Attardo and Raskin (1991) that for humor to be understood, the reader or listener of the humor must first of all understand the language. Thus, Chauke and Babane's (2015) submission that readers will learn to avoid malapropisms in official and unofficial contexts alike does not recognize the deliberateness that sometimes accompanies the use of malapropisms, especially when trying to elicit humor. Rather, this study perceives it more as an error to be avoided.

Poix (2021) explores linguistic deviation, such as malapropisms, in children's literature as an expression of ingenuity and attraction for the readers, but notes that this creativity may be lost on the readers if the utterance does not stand out or have a resolved incongruity. She notes that this kind of deviance is a continuum – on one end it is absurd and strange but on the other end, it is found to be humorous by readers (or listeners). Poix further sees malapropisms as something that happens unconsciously as a result of ignorance. Clearly, the submission in the work does not

account for the deliberate violation of semantic collocation for the purpose of humor, as some other works have identified.

Gutiérrez et al. (2018) investigate the linguistic and extralinguistic tools used in the creation of jokes and discover that more than half of the time, phonological devices like homophony, are used to enact jokes, and within these phonological devices, suprasegmental features are far less than the segmental features in the creation of humor.

Bamgbose's (2019) study combines linguistic and multimodal resources in the exploration of humor strategies in some situational comedies. The study revealed that phonological, lexical, syntactic and discourse features are what characterize the linguistic devices in the humor strategies, while the multimodal cues are incongruous dressing, props, gesture and gaze. This study presents another instance of humor creation and presentation on digital media; however, its scope focuses only on situational comedies, an area that has enjoyed much more attention than wordplays, particularly, malapropisms.

These studies show how little attention malapropisms have enjoyed in the literature, and how it is still being viewed as an error by some researchers. More so, there is a dearth of research on the deployment of malapropisms for the creation of humor in the digital media and the different social media platforms. Thus, this presents a lacuna that still needs to be filled, thus, the current research seeks to achieve this through a deployment of a phonological, humor and multimodal theories.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Three theoretical frameworks have been combined for a wholesome and balanced analysis of the concept of malapropisms as a humor technique in the data. The phonological theory adopted is distinctive features theory; the theory of humor employed is the Benign Violation Theory and the Multimodality Theory is also adopted to describe the different modes of text presented in the data. This provides a balanced view of the concept of malapropism as a humor technique as well as a phonological creation.

2.2.1 Distinctive Features Theory

Distinctive features theory (DFT) is an analytical concept that is situated within Generative Phonology. It conceives of the phoneme as being made up of a set of features which distinguish

each one from the other. Also, DFT emphasizes the phonological contrasts of phonemes within a language and provides a set of phonetic and articulatory features for describing a phoneme differently from another phoneme. When a feature is present within a phoneme, it carries the addition symbol (+), but when the feature is absent, the subtraction sign (–) is used. Thus, the principle of binarity applies in DFT. With the aid of these features, DFT is also able to describe sounds in groups, using features that are peculiar to them. This concept was publicized in Chomsky and Halle (1968), although it was not the first time it was coming to light. This theory is chosen to explain the deployment of word play to achieve malapropism in the data. the theory is appropriate because malapropism involves the deliberate use of a contextually inappropriate word which sounds similar to the appropriate one, for the sake of humor. There are quite a number of these features, and they have been diagrammatically illustrated below to show how they are related to one another and constitute the distinctive features.

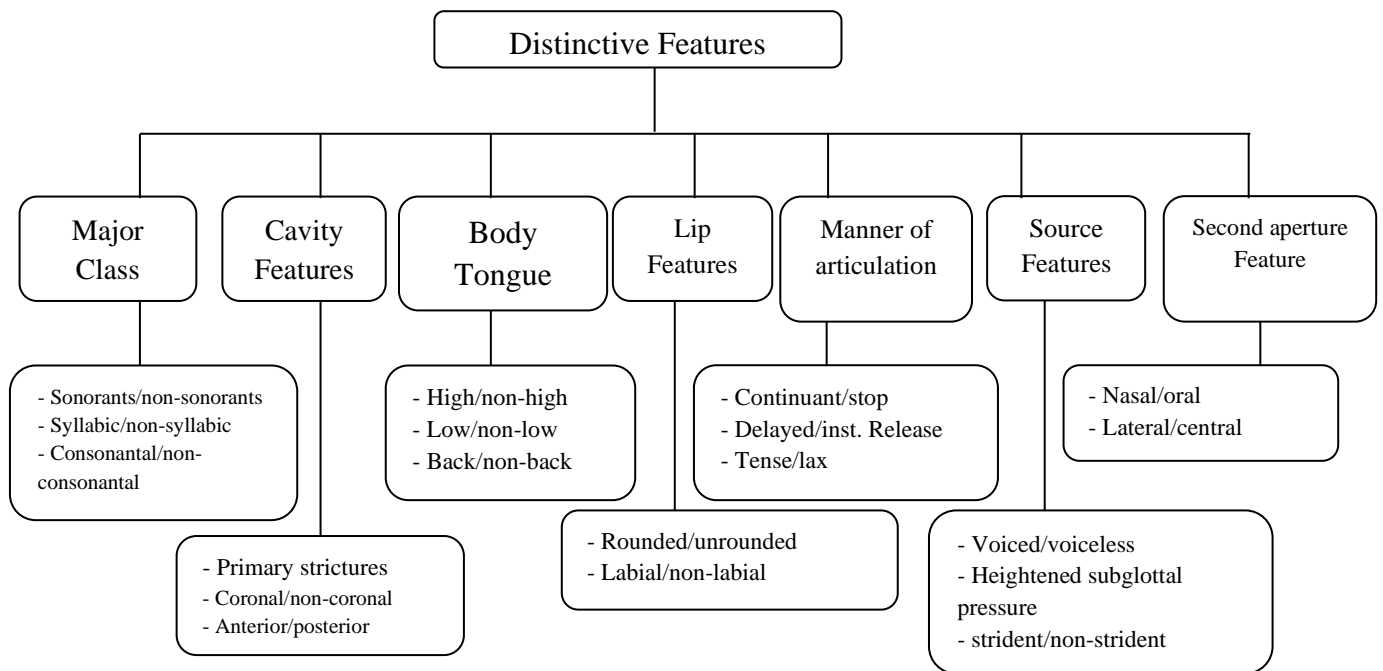


Figure 1. Classification of distinctive features according to Chomsky and Halle (1968)

2.2.2 Benign Violation Theory

Krikmann (2006) and Attardo (1994) identify theories of humor as having three broad branches, the first of which is the theories of incongruity. Krikmann (2006) explains that this set of theories are very cognitive in nature and involve two parallel sides of content which ought to never meet

or have anything in common, however, this lack of meeting point is soon overridden by the consumer of the humor who immediately realizes that there is a meeting point which was not immediately obvious to the mind. The humor lies in the realization of this revelation. The American Psychological Association dictionary describes incongruity theories as “the juxtaposition of incompatible or contradictory elements” to elicit humor. Incongruity theories explain why people find some things funny as well as what makes a situation funny. In exact terms, Straus (2014, 26) submits that Incongruity theories view humor as the violation of how things are usually ordered—it is this violation that engenders humor.

Benign Violation Theory, which has been purposefully chosen as the theory of humor for this research, is one of the incongruity theories. Veatch's Violation hypothesis of humor is a precursor to McGraw and Warren's (2010) Benign Violation hypothesis (McGraw and Warren 2010). According to this theory of humor, something is humorous when all three of the following circumstances exist:

1. a norm is violated,
2. this violation is a harmless one, and
3. the first two conditions occur simultaneously.

In order to generate humor, a circumstance that is typically considered the norm must be violated; nevertheless, this breach must be benign such that no harm results from it. The simultaneous occurrence of both the violation and the harmlessness is the third prerequisite for humor.

Different areas are affected by these infractions, including one's own decency, grammar standards, linguistic conventions, sound creation, accents, social expectations, and moral and cultural norms, among others. The infringement might be committed against the characters in the skits in a comic context as well. The benign nature of the norm transgression can also be shown in how it varies from culture to culture or from context to situation. BVT is a suitable theory of humor for the current research since it allows for a permissible breach of the laws of word usage in order to achieve a comic word play in the data.

2.2.3 Multimodal discourse analysis

A multimodal approach to discourse analysis has become a necessity because of the different modes and forms that texts take in contemporary times, such as videos, gifs, pictures, in addition to texts. Lyons (2016) confirms this by stating that multimodal studies are premised on three major

assumptions which are that first discourse perpetually involves the deployment and interconnectedness of multiple modes like speech, writing, gestures, images and the like. The study also adds that meaning is generated through the selection and configuration of these different modes, and lastly, after a while, interactants' choice of any or some of these modes becomes socially motivated, thus creating a cultural sense for meaning communication. Kress (2009) describes mode as "a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning," and these modes must be able to project a situation, experience or an action; they must be able to show the kind of relationships that exist among the users of the mode; both representations must exist coherently.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodality theory suggests that there is no one-to-one connectedness between meaning and sound, instead, the grammatical level serves as an intervening level. This theory is based on Halliday's metafunction of language, which holds that semiotic modes are composed of three metafunctions - ideational, interpersonal and textual - that are able to form texts which are logically related to each other. Ideational metafunction is defined as the ability of semiotic systems to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system or in the semiotic system of a culture. Interpersonal metafunction involves two kinds of participants, the represented participants and the interactive participants. Three types of relations exist: image act and the gaze, size of frame and social distance, modality, colour and perspective and the subjective image. Textual function captures the organisation of meaning as coherent texts and units.

3. Methodology

The data were collected from an Instagram account called *pain_cakes_* which was created in April, 2022. According to the details on the account, it is being operated from the United States of America. This Instagram account is dedicated to posting short videos (reels) of pancakes that bear different types of messages. These messages contain malapropisms, pictures and subtle instructions on who to share the reels with. The videos were paused when the message and pictures were being displayed, and these were screenshot and saved for analysis. A total of 200 of such posts were collected for analysis. The posts were grouped according to their functions, and there were a total of eight functions. A total of eleven pictures were purposively selected for analysis

from all the groups. The ones that were chosen have been analyzed using multimodal theory, benign violation theory and distinctive features theory. The design of the research is descriptive.

4. Analysis

The 200 Instagram posts were purposively grouped into eight, based on their functional and thematic preoccupation. The table below presents at a glance the distribution of the data across the different functions. In the analyses that follow, the different modes engaged by the author as well as the acts of malapropism created in the posts have been engaged using multimodality and distinctive features theory, respectively. Using the benign violation theory likewise, attention is paid to the achievement of humor through the words.

S/N	Functions	Frequency
1.	Apologetic	5
2.	Appreciative	2
3.	Complimentary	49
4.	Congratulatory	1
5.	Exhortative	26
6.	Friendly	61
7.	Rebuking	8
8.	Romantic	48
	Total	200

Table 1. Distribution and frequency of the functions of the malapropisms

4.1 Apologetic Malapropisms

There are a total of five malapropisms which function as some form of apology in the data. In the image below, “I wanna see other people!” has been creatively written as “I wanna see *otter* people.” The focus of the analysis is on the word *otter*, which is a deliberate substitution for *other*. In addition to this substitution, an otter is painted below the text as a form of reinforcement of the joke. *Other* and *otter* are indeed very close in pronunciation – both words contain the same sounds but for two segments. Thus, both words are distinctive based on two segments. This is represented below.

/'ʌ.ðəʳ/ “Other”		/'ɔ.təʳ/ “Otter”	
/ʌ/	/ð/	/ɔ/	/t/
[+ mid]	[+ continuant]	[- mid]	[- continuant]

The segments above are what distinguish the words from each other, and the distinctive features of the sounds have been presented above. While the peak of the first syllable in *other* /ʌ/ is a central vowel, that of *otter* /ɔ/ is a back vowel, thus, both sounds are different from each other in terms of the position of the tongue. Regarding the consonant sound likewise, /ð/ in *other* is a continuant, a fricative, while /t/ in *otter* is a stop, also known as a plosive. Therefore, although these words sound alike, have the same number of phonemes, and have the same syllabic structures, they are distinct in these features above.

The juxtaposition of both words is a deliberate and creative attempt at create humor through malapropism. The humor in this substitution is evidently explained by the Benign violation theory which projects that when a violation is harmless then humor has occurred. There is an obvious violation of language in the instance above; however, this violation is not one that impedes comprehension, especially with the presence of an image of an otter as well as the similarity in the words *otter* and *other*.



Figure 2. I WANNA SEE OTTER PEOPLE!

Furthermore, the image of an otter, as seen in figure 1 above, presents a multimodal message that reinforces the humor in the joke, showing that the use of *otter* in the text is not a mistake at all, but a deliberate attempt at a joke. The ideational metafunction in the figure is clearly

represented as the carnivorous mammal called otter. A clear interpersonal relationship is painted between the interactive participants – the author of the malapropism and the receiver of the message; the represented participant, that is the otter, is simply a means to the end of reinforcing the juxtaposition that already occurs in the text. The message behind the malapropism is a form of apology because the sender of the message wants out from a relationship in order to try new ones with other people, and this person is asking in an apologetic manner. The other instances of apologetic malapropisms in the data are presented below

Sowy u feel so waffle! (An image of a waffle)
Sorry you feel so awful!

I'm sorry twas a miss steak (An image of a steak)
I'm sorry, it was a mistake

Sowy u had a ruff day (An image of a dog)
Sorry you had a rough day

Peese frog-ive me (An image of a frog)
Please forgive me

4.2 Appreciative Malapropisms

There are two malapropisms in the data that function as appreciative messages. “Thank you beary much!” is presented in the figure with an accompanying image act of a bear. This is a recreation of the statement “Thank you very much!”, where *very* has been substituted with a non-existent word that is coined from ‘bear’. The use of a non-existent word itself is a form of violation, but it is one that can be considered to be benign as a result of the perceived humor behind the coinage. The similarity in the sound pattern of both words, *very* and *beary* is a deliberate effort geared towards achieving malapropism. The distinctive feature analysis is done below.

/ˈveri/ “Very”	/ˈbiəri/ “beary”
/v/	/b/
[+ continuant]	[– continuant]
/e/	/ə/
[+ high]	[– high]

The distinctiveness is present in the first syllable of both words, whereas, the second syllables are the same. A continuant, specifically a fricative /v/, is the first phoneme in *very*, while a stop, specifically voiced bilabial plosive /b/ is what is present in *beary*. The vowel phonemes too are distinct from each other, while the former /e/ is high, the latter /ə/ is mid, thus, their distinctiveness. Therefore, the two words sound similar but are still distinct in their first syllables. The choice of *beary* to replace *very* seems strange to the ears, hence the violation, however, this violation is also a harmless and benign one so that the simultaneous occurrence of these two produces humor.



Figure 3. THANK YOU BEARY MUCH!

The accompanying image act of a bear is what the author of this malapropism uses to show that the word *beary* is not an error at all, but a deliberate attempt to deviate from the norm. Thus, this image act is an ideational representation of what the creator believes the reader already knows. In other words, it is a kind of conversation between the interactive participants – the creator and the reader/viewer of the post. The textual metafunction presents the image as well as text as they relate to each other; this presentation is done in such a way that one complements the other. There is one more instance of a malapropism that functions as an appreciation, and it is presented below.

I a.peach.iate you! (An image of a peach)

I appreciate you!

4.3 Complimentary Malapropisms

This has one of the highest frequencies, 49, therefore, two instances have been selected for analyses. In the instance of “UR A TREE·MENDOUS FRIEND!,” there has been a creative presentation of the word “tremendous.” First, its spelling has been tweaked and then the word has been split into two with the use of a dot. This split shows the word ‘tree’ and then ‘mendous’. The first syllable in ‘tremendous’ is what has been recreated to show malapropism, this recreation is not only in terms of sounds, it is also seen at the level of orthography. The benign violation in this instance can therefore be said to have occurred at the orthographical and phonetic levels, with the addition of another letter ‘e’ and the substitution of the short vowel /ɪ/ with a long one /i:/, respectively. The distinctive feature analysis is done below

/trɪ'men.dəs/ “tremendous”	/tri:.men.dəs/ “tree-mendous”
/ɪ/	[i:]
[– tense]	[+ tense]

In the pair of words above, the words are the same except for the length of the peak in their first syllables. While the first word has a short vowel, the second has a long vowel, as recreated by the malapropism creator. The distinctiveness of both words is in the length of the peak in their first syllables. This distinctiveness is reflected in spelling too, although distinctive features theory only covers the sound segments. Also, this spelling in turn links with the image act that is provided in the multimodal text.



Figure 4. UR A TREE·MENDOUS FRIEND!

There is an image act containing two smiling trees, a reflection of what is shown in the creative malapropism—*tree-mendous*. Apart from the smiling trees, there are also two love symbols colored in red. There is a conspicuous interaction between the interactive participants through the text written above the pancake, and this is an instruction for the post to be sent to one’s bestie. In the reel, this instruction is also voiced. Thus, the malapropism creator as well as the viewers can be said to be undergoing some kind of interaction. In fact, it can also be argued that a third person is alluded to in this multimodal conversation, and this third party is the bestie who would be receiving the post.

The violation that has occurred in the course of producing this malapropism is a benign and subtle one, because when it comes to the length of vowels, if careful attention is not paid, it is quite easy to miss. Thus, the lengthening of the peak in the first syllable, as well as the extra letter ‘e’ in the spelling are violations that can be deemed as harmless but intentional, in order to create a humorous quality in the message. Thus, BVT clearly explains that these violations are for the purpose of humor. Additionally, the meaning of tremendous, something that inspires awe, shows that the friend being referred to is one that inspires and this definitely culminates into a compliment.

Since there are so many malapropisms used to pay compliments in the data, another instance has been analyzed below. This involves the recreation of “You’re beautiful” as “UR BREW·TIFUL!” Again, the recreation has been separated from the rest of the word with a dot and a corresponding image act is provided below the text. Taking it from the phonetic perspective, the distinctness between the words *brew-tiful* and *beautiful* lies in the first syllable. The distinctive features analysis is done below.

/bju:.ti.f ^ə l/ “Beautiful”	/bru:.ti.f ^ə l/ “brewtiful”
/j/	/r/
[– consonantal]	[+ consonantal]
[– anterior]	[+ anterior]
[– high]	[+ high]

Although both words have the same number of syllables (three), the distinctiveness lies in the first syllable as shown above, where a palatal sound is wedged between the stop and the back vowel /u/ in “beautiful,” whereas an approximant /r/ is what it has been replaced with in “brew·tiful.” The

latter does not exist in the English language, however, it has been created in order to have something similar to *beautiful* and to have something connected with ‘brew’ which is what the image act presents. This peculiar coinage is a benign violation and another conspicuous attempt to create humor through a malapropism. The absence of the word in the English lexicon and its use are a ramification of violation.



Figure 5. UR BREW-TIFUL!

Meanwhile, the image act present in the multimodal data shows a jar of something brewed, and the key term here is “brew,” which is directly connected to the coinage—*brew-tiful*. Apart from the image of the smiling and bright-eyed jar, there is also a text, an instruction from the malapropism creator to the viewer, which says “Send this to someone that needs to hear it.” This text is evidence that the creator and the viewer are interactive participants in this multimodal text. An ideational metafunction is also evident here as seen in the knowledge that any liquid that is brewed is usually served in a jar; thus, it is not surprising that the image presented here is that of a jar, one that is smiling and has really bright eyes. There is a connection between the ideational metafunction and the textual metafunction, this connection is secured through the image and the malapropism itself. A few of some of the other instances of malapropism functioning complementarily are listed below.

UR A-DOOR-ABLE! (An image of two doors)
You’re adorable

U ROCK! (An image of two smiling rocks)

You rock

UR A CUTE-CUMBER! (An image of a cucumber)

You're a cucumber

UE BREW-TIFUL! (An image of a jar of something)

You're beautiful

UR GOURD-GEOUS! (An image of a gourd)

You're gorgeous

IM UR BIGGEST FAN! (an image of a fan)

I'm your biggest fan

4.4 Congratulatory Malapropisms

There is only one instance of a malapropism which functions in congratulatory terms, and this is “SNAILED IT!” as a malapropism of “Nailed it!” There is also an image of a snail below the malapropism. In this case, the malapropism is a word that actually exists in the lexicon of the English language but has been used in a different word class from what it usually functions in. That is, *snail* is usually used as a noun, never as a verb; however, it has been used as a verb in this case. This is a kind of violation, although a benign one. Also, the distinctive feature between the malapropism and the actual word is the presence and absence of a segment, respectively. In the case of “snailed,” voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is present as the first segment in the word, while it is absent in “nailed.”



Figure 6. SNAILED IT!

The choice of the word “snailed” is also backed up with an image act in the data. An image of a snail accompanies the message, complementing the message already in text. The common saying to congratulate a person’s success is “you nailed it,” however, this has been creatively presented as seen above in order to create humor in the form of a malapropism. Apart from the image act which relies on the viewers’ knowledge of what a snail looks like, thus representing the ideational metafunction, there is also a communication between the interactive participants who are made up of the malapropism creator and the viewers. As found in the other malapropism posts, there is a direct instruction from the creator for the distribution of the post to people who need to be congratulated over a job well done.

4.5 Exhortative Malapropisms

There are a total of twenty-six exhortative malapropisms in the data and two of them have been randomly selected for analysis. The first malapropism to be examined here is “I BEE LEAF IN U!” and it is accompanied by an image of a bee and a leaf. The actual version of this is “I believe in you!” Thus, the word ‘believe’ has been revised to reflect *bee* in the first syllable and *leaf* in the second syllable. The distinctive features analysis of this, which is presented below, better explains this juxtaposition.

/bɪ.'li:v/ “believe	/bi:.li:f/ “bee·leaf”
/ɪ/	/i:/
[– tense]	[+ tense]
/v/	/f/
[+ voice]	[– voice]

The two words are distinct in two segments spread out in the two syllables that make up the words. In “believe,” the peak in the first syllable is short, while the one in the malapropism version, “beeleaf,” is long. Also, the coda in the second syllable (/v/) of the actual word is voiced, while the recreated one is voiceless (/f/). The distinctiveness between both words lies in these two features of length and voice. These features are not only present in the pronunciation, they are also

clearly reflected in the spelling of the malapropism because instead of the usual spelling as *believe*, it is re-written as *bee leaf*, clearly showing a bee and a leaf. The text in this malapropism is represented multimodally as seen in the figure below.



Figure 7. I BEE LEAF IN U!

There is an image act of a bee as well as a leaf and both are presented as represented participants that even seem to be having a conversation because the bee is smiling but the leaf has its mouth open as if caught mid-speech. This interpersonal relationship presented between the represented participants depicts the kind that would be found in an ideal situation where a friend is encouraging another by telling them how much they believe in them. Apart from the represented participants, there is also a reference to interactive participants who, in this case, are the viewers and the creator the malapropisms. There is a direct instruction for the malapropism to be sent “to a friend that needs to hear it,” this instruction is not only written, it is also voiced in the reel. The image act is a clear representation of the ideational metafunction that viewers are expected to have—a mental image of what a bee and a leaf look like. Also, the textual metafunction perfectly links the ideational and the interpersonal metafunctions using the texts, the images and relying on the viewers’ world view.

The way the word *believe* has been replaced by two different words that only sound similar can be viewed as a violation of how this word is spelt. Another violation is the syntactic misfit that the choice of the words presents to the sentence structure. However, this violation is a harmless one; in fact, it is one that is aimed at creating humor, as clearly emphasized by the accompanying

image acts. Thus, the replacement of these words is an instance of malapropism, one that is geared towards encouraging its readers and viewers alike.

Another instance of an exhortative malapropism is found in “U GOAT THIS!” which is a creative representation of “You got this!” The malapropism is in “Goat,” a creative rendition of “got.” The feature that distinguishes “goat” from “got” is the peak in both words – while the former has a diphthong, the latter has a monophthong. Apart from this, the peak in *got* is a high vowel while there is a combination of a mid and a back vowel in *goat*; hence, although they are both vowels, these features distinguish one from the other.

/gɔt/ “got”	/gəʊt/ “Goat”
/ɔ/	/əʊ/
[+ high]	[- high]

Therefore, although both structures above are similar, they are still two different words which have been juxtaposed to violate the correct syntactic order that is permissible in the English language. Because according to the grammatical rules of English, *goat* is primarily a noun, while *got* is a verb. Thus, the replacement of *got* with *goat* is quite a violation. However, this violation is a mild one because of the apparent intention of creating humor. The combination of this violation and the mildness is intended for humor in the readers and viewers of the post. The distinctive features analysis above explicates this differentiation better.



Figure 8. U GOAT THIS!

Apart from the text, an image act also accompanies the post and it is an image of a goat, just under the text. This image is provided in the figure above. It contains a represented participant, a goat, which directly complements the malapropism, “goat.” There is also a communication between the interactive participants—the creator and the viewer—and the communication is based on an instruction from the former to the latter, which is that the post should be shared with “someone that needs some reassurance.” The combination of the different types of modes – the text and the image – is a complementary one because both come together to provide reassuring words about a person’s ability. Perhaps, an ideational and intertextual reading of the word “goat” can also be read into its meaning according to the football register which means “Greatest of all time.” Thus, all the malapropism and the intricacies of the textual, ideational and interpersonal metafunctions are towards encouraging the readers and viewers that they have the latent strength and ability to be successful at their chosen assignment. Some examples of the other malapropisms that function as exhortations are provided below.

RISE AND BRINE (an image of pickles)
Rise and shine

STAY POSITIVE (an image of a battery)

JUST BE UR SHELL F! (an image of a shell)
Just be yourself

STAY JAWSITIVE (an image of a shark)
Stay positive

HAVE AN EGGCELLENT DAY! (an image of an egg)
Have an excellent day

SENDING YOU ENCOURAGEMINT! (an image of mint)
Sending you encouragement

4.6 Friendly Malapropisms

There are a total of 61 friendly malapropisms and one of them has been randomly selected for analysis. The first friendly malapropism chosen for analysis is “JUST CHICKEN UP ON U!” where chicken has been used to replace the expected “checking” and an image of a chicken is used

below the text. “Chicken” and “checking” are two very similar words except for the vowel sound in their first syllables as well as the coda in their second syllables.

/ˈtʃe.kɪŋ/“Checking”	/ˈtʃi.kɪn/“Chicken”
/e/	/ɪ/
[+ spread]	[– spread]
/ŋ/	/n/
[+ posterior]	[– posterior]

The two words as shown in the distinctive features analysis are distinct in two different areas, a peak and a coda; therefore, these make them two different words. *Checking* has a spread vowel /e/ in its first syllable and ends its second syllable with a velar nasal sound /ŋ/, however, *chicken* has an unspread vowel sound /ɪ/ in its first syllable and a nasal sound /n/ in the coda of its second syllable. A perusal of the presented text *JUST CHICKEN UP ON U!* shows that the sentence does not read well when it has *chicken* in it, because it would be missing a verb, thus, this sentence would be a violation of a typical English sentence. However, when *chicken* is replaced with *checking*, it becomes a well written sentence. The use of *chicken* instead of *checking* is no coincidence or error; rather it is a deliberate violation with a similarly sounding word in order to create some kind of humor. The Benign Violation Theory clearly explains this seemingly erroneous choice as a creation of humor.



Figure 9. *JUST CHICKEN UP ON U!*

The malapropism is a multimodal one because apart from the text, an image act of a chicken and a chick are depicted as seen in the figure above. The content is a friendly way of catching up with friends and saying hello. The represented participants (the chicken and chick) look happy because while the chicken is *blushing*, the chick is smiling. There are several other instances of friendly malapropisms, and some of them are listed below.

I WUV U DEERLY (An image of a deer)

I love you dearly

WE B·LUNG TOGETHER (an image of two lungs holding hands)

We belong together

YOU LITE UP MY LIFE (An image of a bulb)

You light up my life

IM GRATE-FUL 4 U! (An image of a grater)

I'm grateful for you

SLICE TO MEET YA (An image of two pizza slices)

So nice to meet you

ORANGE U GLAD WE'RE BEST FWENDS (An image of two oranges)

Aren't you glad we're best friends

UR OWL I CARE ABOUT! (An owl)

You're all I care about!

4.7 Rebuking Malapropisms

There are a total of eight instances of malapropisms which function as rebukes. One of the instances—STWAP BEING SHELLFISH—has been analyzed in this section. In this instance, although there are two instances of deliberate violation (Stwap and Shellfish), only one of them

really fits the malapropism structure and that is the latter. The word which fits best in that instance is actually “Selfish,” however, this has been replaced with “shellfish,” a totally different word but one which sounds similar to the appropriate word. Both words differ in only one segment each as shown in the distinctive feature analysis below.

“Selfish” /'sel.fiʃ/	“Shellfish” /'ʃel.fiʃ/
/s/	/ʃ/
[+ anterior]	[– anterior]

According to the feature that distinguishes both segments, one of them, /s/, is a segment that is produced at the anterior part of the oral cavity, while the other /ʃ/ is not produced at the anterior, but in the middle of the oral cavity, that is, the palato-alveolar area specifically. The difference in these features is responsible for the difference in both segments, and both words. Also, the choice of “shellfish” as against “selfish” is a deliberate choice of a totally different word, albeit, auditorily similar words. Therefore, although hearers and viewers see the inappropriateness of the word, they simultaneously see the humor attempt there. Apart from the text, there is also an image and it is shown in the figure below.



Figure 10. *STWAP BEING SHELFISH!*

This image shows the depiction of a shellfish, the malapropised word in the data, thus emphasizing the particular word on which the joke lies. The choice of *shellfish* over *selfish* is a violation of the rules of constructing a typical English sentence, where an adjective would have been more appropriate than a noun like *shellfish*. However, this violation is not a very serious one, because the similarity between *selfish* and *shellfish* is immediately obvious to a reader or viewer and the humor becomes recognizable, thus, the violation is unharmed. The other instances of malapropisms which are rebuking in function are listed below

Y U ACTING SO GUACWARD? (Guacamole)
Why are you so backward?

DON'T BE SO GWUM-PEA! (Peas)
Don't be so grumpy!

UR HISSSTERCIAL! (Snake)
You're hysterical!

STAHP LION 2 ME! (An image of a lion)
Stop lying to me!

DON'T BE SO CRABBY! (A crab)
Don't be so crabby!

U DESSERTED ME! (Ice cream)
You deserted me!

ITS NACHO BIZZ NAZZ! (A nacho)
It's not your business!

4.8 Romantic Malapropisms

The malapropisms classified as romantic in function are those which conspicuously express different kinds of love and there are a total of forty-eight of them. One of them has been analyzed below.

“UR THE LOAF OF MY LIFE!” has been selected for analysis; written fully and appropriately, it is “You're the love of my life!,” thus, *love* has been written as *loaf*. Although syntactically, this structure has not violated a rule of grammar, however, it does not satisfy the principles of acceptability. The word *loaf* is related to bread which is eaten for food; therefore, loaf cannot really be somebody's life, whether literally or idiomatically. A more appropriate word

would have been *love*, so that the sentence would read as “You’re the love of my life.” Thus, *loaf* is a malapropism of *love*, and as found in the other instances, both words sound considerably alike. They are only different in two features—these are analyzed below.

“love” /lʌv/	“loaf” /ləʊf/
/ʌ/	/u/
[+ mid]	[– mid]
/v/	/f/
[+ voice]	[– voice]

The codas in both words are distinct in terms of voice; they share every other feature except voice, where /v/ is voiced and /f/ is voiceless. Thus, this is a distinctive feature of both words. Despite this difference in voice however, both segments still sound very similar, and when said in passing, one may hardly tell the difference immediately. Also, they are distinctive in their peaks, while one is a pure vowel (/ʌv/), the other contains a diphthong (/ləʊf/), although even the diphthong may be monophthongised sometimes. Despite these segmental differences, the two words still sound significantly similar, although they are definitely different words.

The benign violation of the principle of appropriateness lies in the use of *loaf* instead of *love*; however, this violation is not a malicious one. To further corroborate the deliberateness of the use of *loaf*, an image act containing two loaves of bread is provided in the malapropism—a reiteration of this joke. The image is found in the figure below.



Figure 11. *I LOAF U SO MUCH!*

In the figure above, two loaves are visible and they are both smiling and blushing, these two loaves of bread are the represented participants and there is obviously a lot of love between the two of them as represented by the three symbols of love, colored in red. Apart from the represented participants, there is also a communication between the interactive participants and the communication is a form of instruction for the viewers to send the message to someone they would love to remind of how much they are cared about. The ideational metafunction in the malapropism is definitely a representation of love as we know it in the real world, and the interpersonal metafunction is conspicuous between the represented participants as well as between the interactive participants, and the deployment of pictures, symbols and texts culminate into the overall message of love. The other instances of malapropisms that function romantically are listed below

CHOO BAKE ME CRAZY (an image of a cupcake)
You make me crazy

I HAVE SO MUSHROOM IN MY HEART FOR YOU (two mushrooms)
I have so much room in my heart for you

DON'T GO BACON MY HEART! (Bacon, love shape, smiley face)
Don't go breaking my heart!

UR MY SOLE MATE (two shoes)
You're my soul mate

SEND NOODS! (A bowl of noodles)
Send nudes!

WOOD YOU GO OUT WIFF ME? (a log of wood)
Would you go out with me?

U COMB-PLETE ME! (two combs)
You complete me

UR DOLPHINIITLY THE ONE 4 ME! (dolphin)
You're definitely the one for me

I EELY WUV U! (eel)
I really love you!

DO I MAKE YOU CORNY BAYBEE? (corn)
Do I make you horny baby?

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the use of malapropisms as found on an Instagram page dedicated to sharing short videos (reels) of pancakes which carry different types of messages. The exploration was designed to be executed from three different perspectives, that is, phonetic, multimodal and humorous perspectives. The malapropisms were grouped into eight, based on the functions they performed, and one or two from these groups were randomly selected for the three-layered analysis. It was discovered that in order to create a malapropism, at least of the following is always manipulated: stress pattern, word class, syllabic structure or semantics. This finding negates Estrema's (2021) submission that malapropisms usually maintain their word class, stress patterns, and syllabic structures. Also, both existing and non-existent words can be used as malapropisms, yet, meaning as well as humor would still be conveyed. However, both types of words have to be similar to the words that would have been appropriate for the sentence in a non-humorous context. The linguistic tools for achieving malapropisms are not limited to phonetics; rather, semantic and orthographical manipulations are also involved. Malapropisms are an under-researched type of wordplay and should be further appreciated and investigated for the creativity, humor and language ingenuity that people display while using them.

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