A Phonological Study of Mondegreens in English

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Abstract

ABSTRACT An accidental mishearing of a phrase sometimes makes the phrase acquire a new meaning. This mishearing is called ‘mondegreen’. If utterances are composed, on purpose, to result in mondegreens, then their aim is to entertain the hearer and to create jokes and riddles, mainly. For example, a."He took a nice cold shower after his date" (original). b."He took an ice cold shower after his date" (mondegreen). If not, then those mondegreens are accidental and can be applied to any type of speech especially songs and lyrics where the phonological environment sounds ambiguous. For example,a."Excuse me while I kiss the sky" (original). b."Excuse me while I kiss this guy" (mondegreen). The task of this paper is trying to answer the question why we mondegreen. To achieve that, some linguistic theories are applied to explain the act of mondegreening, then a phonological analysis is applied to a group of eight chosen texts. This paper handles, also, the definition of mondegreens, how it came into existence, and types of mondegreens. Finally, findings and conclusions will be listed at the end of the analysis.

Mondegreens are words that result from the mishearing or misinterpretation of a statement or song lyric. Here are 20 mondegreens from famous songs and other works. Richard Nordquist is a freelance writer and former professor of English and Rhetoric who wrote college-level Grammar and Composition textbooks. Updated February 09, 2019. A mondegreen is a word or phrase that results from mishearing or misinterpreting a statement or song lyric. Also known as an oronym. The term mondegreen was coined in 1954 by American writer Sylvia Wright and popularized by San Francisco Chronicle columnist Jon Carroll. The term was inspired by "Lady Mondegreen," a misinterpretation of the line "hae laid him on the green" from the Scottish ballad "The English phonology is the study of the phonology (i.e. the sound system) of the English language. Like all languages, spoken English has wide variation in its pronunciation both diachronically and synchronically from dialect to dialect. The number of speech sounds in English varies from dialect to dialect, and any actual tally depends greatly on the interpretation of the researcher doing the counting. The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary by John C. Wells, for example, using symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet, denotes 24 consonants and 23 vowels used in Received Pronunciation, plus two additional consonants and four additional vowels used in foreign words only. Phonological phrases obligatorily exhibit nal prominence (‘primary phrase nal accent’ [1], see also [12, 7]). A ‘secondary’ phrase-initial F0 rise is optional and not necessarily produced on the very rst syllable of the phrase [12]. Various studies attest the general validity of the RSS across several languages using different re-search paradigms. Explicit evidence for the use of the RSS in the perception of song lyrics is, to the best of my knowledge, currently missing. Figure 1: Left panel: Mis-segmentations in English-German mondegreens broken down by type (deletion / insertion) and prominence of fol-lowing syllable. Right panel: Boundary insertions broken down by type of following word (lexical / grammatical) and prominence of following syll-a-ble.