

## Truth, Unveiling and Parapraxes

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‘It is clear that error is only definable in terms of the truth.’<sup>1</sup> Lacan’s statement carries an important point regarding the question of unveiling. We have known since the early days of psychoanalysis that a mistake cannot be characterized merely as a mistake.

For instance, slips of the tongue still have a striking impact on subjects. Individuals feel compelled to provide explanations for their slips or so-called *speech mistakes*. They insist that this was not their intention. Yet precisely in such a slip, there emerges, for the subject, a moment of truth. “Intention,” moreover, is not an accidental word here; a split between the intended statement and the statement that emerges.

As Freud puts it: “but beyond this we know that one of these intentions must have been in some way forced back from being put into effect before it can manifest itself as a disturbance of the other intention.”<sup>2</sup>

Slips of the tongue are evidence of the effect of the signifier on the subject and it is precisely one of those moments of truth: “Truth emerges from a misunderstanding, a lapsus, a bungled act, something that trips up and reveals “a truth from behind”, another meaning.”<sup>3</sup>

What appears to be a mistake is not, in fact, a mistake, “we have made in the other cases that the suppression of the speaker's intention to say something is the indispensable condition for the occurrence of a slip of the tongue.”<sup>4</sup>

For this example, we can look at Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. *The Rivals* is a comedy centred around love, honour and romantic fantasy, where emotional excesses are resolved in a comical manner. The character of Mrs Malaprop exemplifies a slip of the tongue: “and as she grew up, I would have her instructed in geometry, that she might know something of the contagious countries.”<sup>5</sup> She uses the word *contagious* instead of *contiguous*. Mrs. Malaprop’s slip of the tongue represents the disruption of the ideal of appearing “wise” within society. It is a lapse that exposes the hollowness beneath the image of wisdom she seeks to project.

Yet what she says and what she intends to say are constantly intertwined and confused. While she claims that “girls should not speak incorrectly,” she herself commits the most striking

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I Freud's Papers on Technique* (1953–1954), trans. J. Forrester, London: Norton, 1991, p.263.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, S., “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis” (1915-1916), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XV*, London: Hogarth Press, 1961, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Bosquin-Caroz, P., “VARIETY. Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis”, *Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme 2026*, p.3. Available at: <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ARGUMENT-NLS-CONGRESS-2026-PBC.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Freud, S., “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis” (1915-1916), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XV*, London: Hogarth Press, 1961, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Sheridan, R.B., “The Rivals”(1751), “The School For Scandal and Other Plays”, Penguin Books, 1988, p.51.

errors. Therefore, a slip, no matter how much it is denied, will continue to be the embodied form of truth, ‘in short, error is the habitual incarnation of the truth.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique*, (1953–1954), trans. J. Forrester, London: Norton, 1991, p.263