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A Semantic Analysis of Cross-Linguistic Mondegreens: Implications on How Filipinos Interpret Meanings

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Abstract

Historical evidence reveals that mishearing words have contributed to language enrichment. Presently, such mishearing persists in the form of *mondegreens*, which are quite pervasive in the field of songs. However, most studies on this phenomenon have primarily focused on phonology, leaving its scope explored insufficiently. This qualitative study aimed to investigate other aspects of *mondegreens*, especially their semantic dimensions. Grounded on the theory of linguistic relativity and semantic fields, the methods of this paper analyzed 131 unique English lyrics from about 5,000 message threads on public online forums and news websites using content analysis. Data mining was used to verify the content analysis, which was done through intercoder validation. It was found that *mondegreens* caused the lyrics to either be semantically anomalous or semantically sound, albeit with changes in meaning. Six processes were identified for the semantically anomalous changes, while seven were identified for the semantically sound changes. Even more, the major implication this has on the understanding of Filipinos is that no matter what genre or semantic field the songs belong to, they most likely would be shifted to the field of humor or comedy. Despite this tendency for humor shifting, this shows language indigenization and enrichment and reflects the positive Filipino spirit.

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Music has always played an integral part in human life. It seeps into various aspects of human existence, which are palpable in worship, entertainment, and even education. As supported by Titon et al. (2009), every human society has music. It means different things and involves different activities around the globe. This only shows the prevalence of music to humanity as well as its functionality. Nevertheless, among the contributions of music to people's lives, perhaps one of the most elusive uses it has is in the field of language since there has been a long-standing notion of the division between language learning and music.

However, the future of this area of study is not as bleak as it may seem since breakthroughs have emerged in the field of neuropsychology. For instance, the study done by Pino, Giancola, and D'Amico (2023) reveals that music is crucial in language development in a person's earlier years. The findings have shown that properties of music, such as rhythm and melody, have a significant impact on the acquisition of language, such as in the aspects of phonology, syntax, and even grammar. Thus, this disproves the myth of language-music exclusivity and reinforces the claim of interconnectedness.

Interestingly, since most music today includes lyrics, the language-music relatedness would also have implications regarding multilingualism/bilingualism and shifts of cognitive frameworks when listening to music in the native tongue or a foreign language. After all, language and its use are a form of identity marker. As mentioned by Bhatia and Ritchie (2006), language serves as a unique personal marker, and by being a member of two or more speech communities, an individual could manifest a unique pattern of language use derived from various linguistic influences. To use a language or to understand a language is to take up the mental framework of that language's community members, thus influencing one's affect, perspective, production, and even comprehension of texts and passages.

Given that languages have unique linguistic systems, such as phonological, syntactic, and even lexical systems, cognitive shifts and grasping the meanings of passages or song lyrics may sometimes have complications. For example, lack of vocabulary for certain lexical items, lack of syntactic mastery, and as simple as phonological lapses can cause obfuscation to the understanding of textual meanings, including a song's lyrics. Such an issue can arise from the phenomenon known as *mondegreens*.

According to Abdurrahman and Abdurrahman (2012), new meanings emerge when phrases are accidentally misheard. Such mishearing can be labeled as an aural malapropism, and such a process of auditory misperception can be called a *mondegreen*. Such labels can be applied to various contextual discourses, which can be lush domains for such a phenomenon. Furthermore, Scherling, Kornder, and Kelly (2022) mention that *mondegreens* are usually misperceived auditory phenomena related to songs from an individual's native language. However, findings reveal that these can also occur transversely in multiple languages. This is known as "cross-linguistic *mondegreens*." As such, listeners may hear the words and phrases in the lyrics of foreign songs in their L1 and appropriate them to their linguistic systems. Therefore, "*mondegreening*" can occur within or across languages, leading to the emergence of original yet interesting meanings.

Unfortunately, most *mondegreen* studies have only focused on phonological aspects. For example, Smith (2003) investigated how advanced English learners in Hong Kong tried to distinguish various terms while transcribed lyrics. It was found that because of the lack of phonological mastery in the learners, an attempt to make sense of unfamiliar English sounds and words emerged. Additionally, Beck, Kardatzki, and Ethofer (2014) used a neuroscientific approach to the phenomenon. In their study, it was revealed that expectations and prior knowledge had a strong influence on the perception of *mondegreens*. Also, in the study of Scherling et al. (2022), it was found that cross-linguistic *mondegreens* emerge due to misperception and reinterpretation of foreign lyrics into one's L1. In Japan, this is called *soramimi*, which literally means mishearing. Such changes that occur in the understanding of the English lyrics result from the reinterpretation of the foreign input

into the listener's native linguistic system (i.e., phonological and morphological). Therefore, such misperceptions are not random but rather are governed by the linguistic systems of the listener's native language. Finally, in the study by Abdurrahman and Abdurrahman (2012), they found that mondegreens occur because of various triggers among mondegreens. As such, syllable boundaries play a crucial role in identifying the boundaries of words and their meanings.

These studies only prove how limited the exploration of such a phenomenon has been. As mentioned earlier, mondegreens also have semantic implications that influence peoples' understanding/ comprehension. Thus, investigating such aspects could lead to rich discoveries and help further demystify this phenomenon, given the dearth of scholarly works related to other areas. The article of Aronson (2009) can be cited as an example of these semantic shifts. Forlorn hope, an abstract emotion, comes from a military term. An avocado, presently a fruit, came from a legal term. Finally, a medical procedure such as the Heimlich maneuver came from a political method. These only reveal that even before and until the present, mondegreens have contributed to word formations and the shifting of semantic fields. Thus, other understudied aspects of the investigation of mondegreens and their potential impacts on meaning-making are the driving forces behind pursuing this scholarly endeavor.

More so, this study followed a qualitative approach employing techniques most useful for handling words and linguistic data. As Gray et al. (2007) mentioned, the benefit of using qualitative approaches is their ability to convey intricacies of interpretation and meaning that numbers cannot convey. Connectedly, this paper is guided by the following theories:

First is the theory of linguistic relativity by Whorf (1956), which purports that there is an apparent variation in the systems of different languages that influence the way people perceive, behave, and analyze their experiences of the world. Therefore, even if individuals are placed in a similar situation, they would manifest different actions and behaviors in such circumstances. Furthermore, since this study would involve mondegreens of English songs as perceived by Filipinos, making sense of a foreign language using a local lens would entail a level of appropriation or reinterpretation, especially since the lyrics have been misperceived. This is where the concept of cross-linguistic mondegreens comes in. This is even paralleled in the study conducted by Kadarisman (2015), which discussed the concept of cultural relativity, linguistic relativity, and the teaching of foreign languages. In her study, she pointed out that different languages are culturally and structurally unique. Therefore, when teaching students various languages, this uniqueness needs to be made more apparent to achieve better integration of cultural and linguistic sensitivity. As such, this paper and Kadarisman's paper both argue that different languages enshrine unique structures and ways of viewing the world and when these various languages come in contact with each other, compromises (e.g., adaptations, borrowings, shifting) arise since they are using non-native tools and faculties.

This study also involved the theory of semantic fields, which was guided by using the 21 major fields of discourse of the UCREL Semantic Analysis system. As defined by Crystal (2008), semantic field theory emerged in the 1930s, which claimed that the words in a language are not merely random listings of isolated words but rather are organized into fields or domains wherein the terms associate with each other and provide meanings to each other in many ways. In this study, semantic fields played a crucial role since mondegreens tend to shift the semantic fields of words and phrases, leading to a new understanding of a text (in this case, the lyrics of the songs). Pursuing this scholarly work revealed the aspects of cross-linguistic meaning-making and the concrete semantic changes caused by misinterpreting mondegreens.

Materials and Methods

This research primarily endeavored to investigate two aspects related to cross-linguistic mondegreens: first, the semantic shifts that happen due to the phenomenon, and second, the implications these have on Filipino's meaning-making using local constructs and linguistic resources. Specifically, the following research questions guided this paper: 1) What processes do mondegreens give rise to, affecting the songs' semantic fields? and 2) How do these reflect the Filipino listeners' understanding of the English songs?

This paper used a qualitative content analysis approach using a list of buzzwords and buzzword combinations to provide a methodical way to gather the data needed to code, organize, and analyze text sources (Panke, 2018). This approach was used because, as a technique in research, it provides novel ways of understanding social phenomena or provides a basis for making appropriate decisions on significant actions. More so, it is a research method for drawing reliable conclusions about the context in which texts are used. Lastly, it has been known to produce valid and reliable results because it employs specialized procedures (Salkind, 2010). Furthermore, this research was guided by Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity as the umbrella concept for inter-linguistic perspectives, supplemented by Crystal's theory of semantic fields to determine how Filipinos make sense of cross-linguistic mondegreens.

Also, this paper used data mining, as Ramageri (2010) defined it, as extracting crucial knowledge and patterns from a large corpus. This approach was used to gather data from online discussion forums and digital news platforms using the following input in the search bar: misheard lyrics by Filipinos and mondegreens misheard by Filipinos. Utilizing various strategies and tactics, data mining integrates automated data extraction, modeling, and processing. In order to accomplish a project's goals, data mining is usually carried out using an organized methodology that outlines activities, inputs, outputs, and directions for their implementation (Mariscal et al. 2010 in Plotnikova et al. 2022). It is also significant to mention that the data mined from the websites and online public discussion forums were limited to English songs. This study's primary objective is to explore cross-linguistic differences in the Filipinos' interpretation of English Songs.

Using content analysis and data mining, while being guided by Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity and Crystal's semantic fields, the researcher set parameters and criteria for gathering the corpus such that: (1) they must be in the English language, (2) occurrence of mondegreens at the various levels (e.g., word level, phrasal level, and sentence level) will be included, (3) mondegreened lyrics will make it to the list regardless of the background of the singer as long as the lyrics of his/her song is in English, and (4) these lyrics must come from entries of public discussion forums and websites that appear when the keywords are searched (i.e. misheard lyrics by Filipinos and mondegreens misheard by Filipinos). In data processing, the steps that were followed (i.e., data gathering, coding, thematizing, and removing of unrelated corpus) and the guidelines in data selection were cross-checked by a field expert to lessen researcher subjectivity. This was done to ascertain data validity and instrument reliability. After the intercoder validation, the mondegreened lyrics were set alongside their original lyrics. Then, their meanings were glossed, and patterns were identified. By highlighting these patterns, a better understanding of how Filipinos make sense of the new lyrics was revealed.

The choice of data sources was motivated by the pervasiveness of the internet and social media's role in today's world. Onyema et al. (2019) even mention that with the rise of online discussion forums, members can easily access discussion threads and share their thoughts to provide a resolution to certain problems or to give responses to posted queries. Such forums can be accessed on social networking platforms like X (formerly Twitter) or Facebook. In relation to this, digital news platforms, which are migrated news formats, have changed how news is consumed, distributed, and produced

(Dolata in Wilding, Fray, Molitorisz, Mckewon, 2018). This is even more apparent since netizens make the internet their leading news source (Newman et al. qt. in Vermeer et al., 2020). Thus entailing a rich source of data that people can read and consume.

Using the mentioned approach, this study was able to extract data from online discussion forums and news websites such as TeamManilaLifestyle (Team Manila Lifestyle, 2013), a Filipino lifestyle news site, and Filipino Tweets that Matter (FTTM) via Facebook (FTTM, 2017). One hundred thirty-one unique English song lyrics were collected and analyzed, culled from approximately 5,000 threads.

Results and Discussion

The salient findings of this study are detailed in this section. It aims to answer the two research questions: (1) What processes do mondegreens give rise to, thereby affecting the songs' semantic fields? and (2) How do these mondegreens reflect the Filipino Listeners' understanding of the English songs?

This section is divided into two. The first part discusses the semantic processes that emerged because of mondegreens. Based on the analysis, it was found that the process of mondegreening makes the song lyrics either semantically anomalous or semantically sound. Six processes were identified that caused semantical anomaly, while seven were identified for those that led to semantic soundness. It is also important to note that, in categorizing the semantic fields and identifying the shifts, the paper was guided using the 21 major discourse fields of the UCREL Semantic Analysis system. More so, explorations on the impacts of these semantic changes on Filipino understanding are elaborated in the second part.

Mondegreen-induced Changes Processes Leading to Semantic Anomalies

According to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2011), a semantic anomaly occurs when sentences are rendered uninterpretable or meaningless due to violations of how words are combined or placed in sequence. In the case of the cross-linguistic mondegreens, the semantic anomalies are caused by the use of gibberish words, noun transformations, syntactic errors, proper noun substitutions, multiplicity/ hyperbole, and lexical gaps. These violations are the products of the listeners' attempt to repair the lines they misheard. Because of these, all semantic fields are shifted to meaninglessness/ emptiness. The following subsections explain each process in detail.

Gibberish. Yilmazyildiz et al. (2010) define *gibberish* as speech produced using senseless combinations of phonetic strings. Because of these productions of gibberish words, the lyrics of the songs become incomprehensible. Some examples are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Song Lyrics Substituted with Gibberish Words

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Level of Transformation
"Its too late to <i>istoklogize</i> .. its too late"	"It's too late to apologize"	Apologize	Word

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Level of Transformation
“ <i>Matendap</i> for love”	“Stand up for love”	Stand Up For Love	Phrase
“ <i>Sariwarap</i> nah-nah-nah, <i>Sariwarap</i> nah-nah-nah let me love you”	“Don't you give up nah-nah-nah, I won't give up nah-nah-nah”	Let Me Love You	Sentence
“TEKESERNA”	“Take your shirt off”	Take Your Shirt Off	Sentence
“ <i>Hi po ta ta nu it</i> ”	“Please don't stop the music”	Please Don't Stop The Music	Sentence

As shown in Table 1, the occurrence of gibberish happens on various levels, such as at a word level (*istoklogize* for apologize), phrase level (*matendap* for stand up), and sentence level (*tekeserna* for take your shirt off, *sariwarap* for don't give up, and *hi po ta ta nu it* for please don't stop the music).

Due to the violations concurred by gibberish, meaningless song lyrics emerge, making the lines unintelligible. Still, these changes can account for the appeal of the songs' musicality, that despite not having grasped the actual words, the listeners still try to capture the cadence of the songs by approximating the syllables and capturing the prevalent vowels and consonants. This ultimately goes to show that songs can connect to people beyond the lyrics and that these made-up phonetic strings could be reflective of the listener's creativity.

Common Noun Transformations. Using a grammatical perspective, Van Valin (2004) classifies a noun as a part of speech that possesses semantic content, such as the name of a person, place, or thing.

In the case of the mondegreened lyrics, some segments of the song, which are not originally nouns, are transformed into nouns or vice versa. There are also cases in which a noun or noun phrase is substituted with another noun, which makes the lines semantically anomalous.

Table 2

Song Lyrics Substituted with Common Noun Transformations

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Movement
“My head's under water and i'm breathing fire...”	“My head's under water but I'm breathing fine...”	All Of Me	Line from original song transformed to noun
“Gallery... couldn't see we were never meant to be...”	“Out of reach. Couldn't see we were never meant to be...”	Out Of Reach	Line from original song transformed to noun
“I'm in love with the shape of you. We push and pull like a magnitude.”	“I'm in love with the shape of you / We push and pull like a magnet do”	Shape Of You	Noun from original song transformed into other grammatical category

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Movement
"And I'll Always Love You, deep inside it's color white I knew, Love You"	"And I'll always love you / Deep inside this heart of mine I do. Love you."	I'll Always Love You	Noun from original song transformed into other grammatical category
"So baby pull me closer in the voucher of your voucher"	"So, baby, pull me closer / In the back seat of your Rover"	Closer	Noun substitution
"I'm a potato trying to call home all of my change I spent on you	"I'm at a payphone trying to call home / All of my change I spent on you"	Payphone	Noun substitution
" Pakinggan of isolation and it looks like I'm the queen" <small>*Pakinggan means to listen</small>	"A kingdom of isolation... and it looks like I'm the queen"	Let It Go	Noun from original song transformed into other grammatical category using code switch

Table 2 shows that it is common for nouns to be changed when mondegreening happens. Because of these changes, the newly transformed lyrics become humorous, amusing, or sometimes absurd, which then makes them incoherent or obscure.

In some rare cases, noun transformation is due to code-switching to the native tongue. Perhaps this is an attempt by the listener to repair the misheard word using a local term that sounds quite similar to the foreign word. More so, like the discussion on gibberish, these noun transformations could be a case of going beyond the meaning and putting a premium on the musical appeal of the songs. Despite the meaninglessness of these newly inserted words, the meter and prosodic effect of the songs are somehow maintained, which makes them still connect to the listeners.

Syntactic Errors. As Hafiz, Omar, and Gul Sher (2018) mentioned, syntactic errors appear frequently and affect a text's semanticity and discourse-level analysis. Usual sentence errors comprise the following: sentence fragments, S-V agreement, wrong use of prepositions, determiners, and conjunctions, among others. Below are the lyrics with syntactic errors.

Table 3

Song Lyrics with Syntactic Errors caused by Mondegreens

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title
"I'm only one for today, I'll be every single day."	"I'm only one call away, I'll be there to save the day"	One Call Away
"Here I am waiting, I'm soon to leave soon. Why do I, holding on?"	"Here I am waiting, I'll have to leave soon"	Daylight
"No one else control to you! No one makes me feel the way you do!"	"No one else comes close to you. No one makes me feel the way you do"	No One Else Comes Close

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title
“Stick my bread to buy me and you”	“Some are great and some are few”	Kaleidoscope World
“All the ship like of the corner all the matris that you stolen”	“Pull the sheets right off the corner / Of that mattress that you stole”	Closer
“Got to believe imagine...”	“Got to believe in magic...”	Got To Believe In Magic
“Hit me like a ray of sun, <i>parang tumanda ka na</i> ” *it seems you have become old	“Hit me like a ray of sun, burning through my darkest night”	Halo

As shown in these examples in Table 3, the lyrics lose their meanings due to the reconfiguration of the original lines to syntactically erroneous ones. These errors include ambiguous referents, flawed grammaticity, and absurd syntagmatic compositions. At times, the use of code-switching accounts for the syntactic errors leading to semantic anomaly.

In conjunction with gibberish and common noun transformations, these also coincide with the “preservation of musicality” framework. More so, these erroneous sentence structures could be reflective of the lack of grammatical mastery because these would not likely happen if a person were particular with semanticity and syntactic correctness.

Proper Noun Substitutions. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2005), by nature, proper nouns are defined as definite names of people, events, and places. They usually occur as heads of phrasal nouns. They can also be derivatives of other phrasal nouns (e.g., Let’s watch some Spielberg).

In the case of mondegreens, substituting some segments of the original lyrics for proper nouns makes the lines semantically anomalous. These examples are shown in the next table.

Table 4

Song Lyrics with Syntactic Errors caused by Mondegreens

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Proper Name Used
“I don’t wanna close my eyes / I don’t wanna fall asleep / cause I miss you babe and I don’t wanna NESCAFE”	“I don’t wanna close my eyes / I don’t wanna fall asleep / cause I miss you babe and I don’t wanna miss a thing”	I Don’t Want To Miss A Thing	Name of Product
“Got a lot of Starbucks lovers / They’ll tell you I’m insane”	“Got a long list of ex-lovers / They’ll tell you I’m insane”	Blank Space	Name of product
“Baby we could turn down the night and close Adore”	“So baby let’s just turn down the lights / And close the door”	Versace On The Floor	Name of a person

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Proper Name Used
"If I die young, bury me in Saturn , lay me down in a bed of roses..."	"If I die young, bury me in satin, lay me down in a bed of roses..."	If I Die Young	Name of a planet
"That we don't wanna fight no more / There will be no more wars / And our children will play Monday, Monday, Monday "	"That we don't wanna fight no more / There will be no more wars / And our children will play One day... one day... one day..."	One Day	Name of a time/day

As shown in Table 4, this process is less fluid than common noun transformations since the changes occur only from the original lyrics to the mondegreened lyrics. However, transforming the original lyrics to proper nouns is quite counterproductive since the lines become obscure because of these changes. Such changes lead to a humorous effect because they make the meanings absurd. For example, instead of not wanting to miss a thing, the person would not want to miss Nescafe, which is coffee, or another one is for a person to be buried in satin in the river, which gives a very eerie and symbolic appeal, compared to being buried in Saturn which makes no sense at all thereby making the image comedic.

Multiplicity/ Hyperbole. Another phenomenon that emerges because of mondegreens is multiplicity or hyperbole, wherein numbers and certain concepts are duplicated or exaggerated after the transformations.

As defined by Johnson and Arp (2018), hyperbole, also known as overstatement, is characterized by exaggeration geared toward veracity. Like other figures of speech, it should not be taken literally since it is merely used to add emphasis to what the speaker wants to express. Some examples are "I'm so hungry, I can eat a horse!" or "She cried a river of tears." In conjunction with other figurative languages, hyperbole can be utilized to achieve various effects such as seriousness, grief, amusement, humor, and delight, among others. In the case of mondegreens, such exaggerations usually lead to a humorous effect and semantic anomaly.

Table 5

Song Lyrics with Multiplicity/ Hyperbole

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title
"Some people want thousand trees / Some just want everything."	"Some people want diamond rings / some just want everything."	If I Ain't Got You
"So honey now / Take me into your ELEVEN arms / Kiss me under the light of a thousand stars"	"So, honey now / Take me into your loving arms / Kiss me under the light of a thousand stars"	Thinking Out Loud
"Like a virgin, touch for the THIRTY FIRST time ..."	"Like a virgin, touched for the very FIRST time ..."	Like A Virgin

As shown in Table 5, there is an apparent exaggeration/ multiplicity in the mondegreened lyrics. Because of these transformations, the meanings lead to absurdity, such as people wanting a thousand trees, being a virgin yet touched thirty-one times, and lastly, someone to have eleven arms.

Such absurd occurrences lead to a humorous effect because they depict phenomena that are unexpected and divergent of common understanding and acceptability. For example, to be a virgin means to be sexually “untouched”, but, in this case, being a virgin, yet one has already been touched thirty-one times, does not make sense. More so, if hyperboles are stated to lead to veracity or strengthened emphasis of truth, then the cases in the mondegreens somehow defeat the purpose because they reveal things that are untrue.

Lexical Gaps. According to Fromkin et al. (2011), lexical gaps are nonexistent words that are well-constructed. A language’s actual words are just a fragment of these potential words. Language users and dictionaries may know thousands of words but cannot capture all possible words. Thus, lexical gaps continue to pervade because even if a word may have a sound construction, not all are attached to meaning.

In the case of mondegreened lyrics, some nonexistent words appear. However, at face value, they would seem like legitimate words. Some examples are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Song Lyrics with Lexical Gaps

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title
“You can take everything I have / You can break everything I am like a mayo glass ”	“You can take everything I have / You can break everything I am like I’m made of glass”	Skyscraper
“She wears short skirt, I wear sneakers / She’s cheer captainette , I’m on the bleachers”	“She wears short skirt, I wear sneakers / She’s cheer captain and, I’m on the bleachers”	You Belong With Me
“She looks so happy in her waiting dress ”	“She looks so happy in her wedding dress”	25 Minutes

Table 6 presents how creative the listeners are in repairing the misheard lyrics of the song. However, even though these words sound legitimate enough to make their way into dictionaries, unfortunately, these are non-existent terms. For example, there is no such thing as a mayo glass. Perhaps there is a mayo jar but not a mayo glass. Captainette could perhaps be a female captain. Or could a waiting dress be an outfit used by waiters?

These terms somehow modified the effect and the original meaning of the songs into a more amusing, humorous, yet meaningless one.

Additionally, this is reflective of the persistence of a logical mind because although these terms do not exist, somehow, they show analytical thinking. For example, people usually add -ette to something to feminize it, like a majorette or bachelorette. Therefore, by following such a principle, the listener somehow asserts such logic to the concept of captain to captainette. Another one is the concept of a mayo glass. Although various containers are used for mayonnaise, glass is the most common in the

Philippines. Thus, applying the rule of logic, perhaps a glass container can be called a mayo glass. On this note, these creative yet logical ways of thinking are prevalent in Philippine English, which could somehow reveal language indigenization. Some other examples in Philippine English include *senatoriable* (a candidate running for the senate), *carnap* (for vehicular theft), and *rubber shoes* (to mean sneakers or running shoes), among others.

Processes Retaining Semantic Soundness

As opposed to semantically anomalous mondegreens, which violate semanticity and lead to semantic emptiness, these processes do not. However, since these are attempts to repair misheard lines, the following changes somehow shift the semantic fields of the songs, transform them, or inject a humorous albeit amusing twist to the lyrics. These semantically sound changes include the use of taboos, reversals, othering, translations, agent/ patient insertion, abstract to concrete transformations, and metaphor reconfigurations.

Below are the processes discussed in detail and some fields that were shifted because of such processes.

Taboo. Taboo topics fall under the categories of ‘free’ and ‘non-free’ information. They are usually associated with (but not limited to) excretions, sex, and intimacy, as well as religious beliefs and practices, among others (Thomas, 1995). These topics are avoided because they are considered Face Threatening Acts or FTAs. As Chapman (2011) mentioned, a Face Threatening Act is described as something that a speaker may need or want to say that can damage the hearer or the speaker’s face. Thus, discussions about taboo topics are avoided as much as possible.

In the case of Mondegreens, the original lyrics are somehow diverted to become taboo in nature. Below are some examples.

Table 7

Song Lyrics with Taboo Transformations

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Classification	Shifted Semantic Field
“So you wanna play with my d*ck”	“So you wanna play with magic?”	Black Magic	Sexualization	‘Magic’ - arts and crafts To ‘d*ck’ - body part
“She’s fucking inside and it feels oh right, maybe this time love won’t end”	“She’s back in his life / And it feels so right / Maybe this time, love won’t end”	Maybe This Time	Sexualization	‘back in his life’ - emotion To ‘fucking inside’ - social action, states and processes

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Classification	Shifted Semantic Field
"I need <i>shabu</i> "	"I need you boo"	With You	Illegal drugs	'I need you boo' - emotion To 'I need shabu' - substance
"Last night you were in my room, now my bed smells shit like you"	"Last night you were in my room / And now my bedsheets smell like you"	Shape Of You	Excrement	'bedsheet' - objects and equipment To 'shit' - the body and the individual

As shown in Table 7, three kinds of taboo topics emerged due to mondegreens. First is sexualization, which is the mention of genitals, intimate actions, or sexual acts. As defined by Bigler, Tomasetto, & McKenney (2019), sexualization occurs when the value of a person is derived chiefly from his/her sex appeal, when sexuality is improperly marked towards them, or when they are sexually objectified for others' satisfaction. In this case, the song lyrics are inappropriately imposed with sexuality. Some fields shifted because of this are arts and crafts, emotion to body parts, and social action, states, and processes.

Another taboo lyric modification is the mention of illegal drugs such as *shabu* or the term for local meth. Because of this, the field of emotion is shifted to substance. Moreover, lastly, excrement using the slang term "shit" instead of the original lyrics, which is a sheet (i.e., bedsheet), shifts objects and equipment to the body and the individual semantic field.

Nevertheless, although these three taboo transformations may be considered offensive by most Filipinos because they are placed in these contexts, their humorous effects somehow cushion the impact. Even more, these utterances somewhat reflect the presently changing values in Filipino society because words like these would not have been openly disclosed in public before. However, today, they are making their way even on social media platforms such as public discussion forums.

Reversals. In the case of reversals, the ideas in the songs gain an opposite effect compared to the original. These reversed ideas transform various aspects, such as actions, meaningfulness, and even sexualization. The next table shows these transformations.

Table 8

Song Lyrics with Reversals

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Reversed Aspect	Shifted Semantic Field
"But if I close your eyes..."	"But if you close your eyes..."	Pompeii	Action	'I'- the body and the individual To 'you'- social action, states, and processes
"I'm bullet proof / nothing to lose / Fly away, fly away / shoot me down...."	"I'm bullet proof / nothing to lose / fire away, fire away / shoot me down...."	Titanium	Action	'fly away'- movement To 'fire away'- psychological actions, states and processes
"I have a ring, and wear it out"	"I Let it rain and I clear it out"	Chicken Noodle Soup	Meaningfulness	'ring'- object To 'rain'- world and environment
"Baby I like your soul"	"Baby, I'll take it slow"	One Dance	Sexualization	'soul'- the body and the individual To 'take it slow'- social action, states, and processes

As shown in Table 8, a range of concepts can be reversed because of mondegreens. First is action in which the intended act is inverted by one person instead of the other. More so, reversed action could mean retreat instead of standing ground, as shown in the lyrics of Titanium, wherein the recipient of the action flies away instead of facing the bullets head-on. Some semantic fields shifted because of this are the body and the individual, movement to social action, states and processes, and psychological states, actions, and processes.

Another reversed lyric is on the aspect of meaningfulness. Somehow, the listener of the song converts the lines from something meaningless into something that makes more sense. For instance, "I let it rain and I clear it out" is quite difficult to grasp because of the use of a very particular slang compared to a more tangible concept such as "I have a ring, and I wear it out." The semantic field of the object is shifted to the world and environment.

Furthermore, lastly is the reversal of sexualization. The use of mondegreen, for this instance, has a "sanitizing" effect because it makes the song more wholesome compared to the original lyrics. For example, "Baby, I'll take it slow," which has sexual undertones to something very pure and wholesome,

like in the line “Baby, I like your soul.” Some semantic fields have shifted from the body and the individual to social action, states, and processes.

Othering. Cultural geographer Crang (in Brons, 2015) explains the meaning of othering as the configuration of individuals in an imbalanced power relation. It is when identities are set up in binary opposition of in-group/ out-group relations, with the in-group ascribed positive characteristics while the out-group has negative ones.

Consciously or unconsciously, othering emerges as an effect of the mondegreened lyrics. These are revealed in the following table.

Table 9

Song Lyrics with Themes of “Othering”

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Classification	Shifted Semantic Field
“She’s black and he’s white”	“It’s black and it’s white”	Hot n’ Cold	Racist undertones	‘it’ - object To ‘she/he’ - social action, states, and processes
“Michael’s in the next room / Sometimes I wish he was you.”	“Well, my girl’s in the next room / Sometimes I wish she was you”	Lips Of An Angel	Homosexual undertones	‘My girl’ - social actions, states, and processes To Michael - names and grammar
“Your hairbrush is mine / And a thousand sensations seduce me / coz I, I do cherish you .”	“Your hand brushes mine / And a thousand sensations seduce me / coz I, I do cherish you .”	I Do (cherish you)	Homosexual undertones	‘Your hand brushes mine’ - social action, states, and processes To ‘Your hairbrush is mine’ - object

As shown in Table 9, two themes of “othering” emerge because of the mishearing of the original lyrics. The first one reflects racist undertones through color segregation, such as the lyrics “she’s black and he’s white.” The semantic field of an object is shifted to social action, states, and processes.

Additionally, the theme of othering is made more apparent by injecting the lyrics with homosexual undertones. These are exemplified in the lyrics “Michael’s in the next room”, instead of “My girl is in the next room” or in the lyrics “your hairbrush is mine” instead of “your hand brushes mine”, which transforms the image of a man and woman walking down a wedding aisle to a man’s implied ownership of the woman’s hairbrush thereby feminizing him. The shifted semantic field is social action, states, and processes to names, grammar, and objects.

Translations. Munday (2001) explains that when the words of one language are translated to another, the translator changes to the original text (the source text or ST) in the verbal language of origin (the source language or SL) and changes it to a target text (TT) which would serve as a target language (TL). One of the three types of translation that Czech structuralist Roman Jakobson outlined in his groundbreaking work “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” is “interlingual translation.”

In this case, the original lyrics of the songs are translated into another language, thereby altering the meaning of the song. Below are some examples.

Table 10

Song Lyrics with Translations

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Shifted Semantic Field
“It’s the— hayop na tiger it’s the queen of the fight!”	“It’s the eye of the tiger”	Eye Of The Tiger	‘eye’- the body and the individual To ‘hayop’- life and living things
“If FIRE-APOY / even just for a day”	“If I were a boy..”	If I Were A Boy	‘if I were a boy’- psychological actions, states, and processes. To ‘if fire-apoy’- world and environment
“Stones / ang english ng bato ay stone”	“Stones / heavy like the love you’ve shown”	Pyramid	‘love’- emotions To ‘bato’- world and environment

Table 10 reveals three instances of translation using the English and Filipino languages. These are instances of what is called code-switching. In the first song, a tiger is somewhat given a translation by saying that it is a “hayop” or an animal. Because of this, the semantic field of body and individual (i.e., focusing on the eye) is shifted to life and living things when focusing on the hayop or animal.

In the second and third examples, the translations are quite literal (i.e., apoy is the Filipino word for fire, while bato is explicitly translated as stone in English). The semantic fields of psychological action, states, processes, and emotions are both shifted to the world and environment.

In general, translations can be classified as being word per word or sense per sense. In the case of the mondegreen-ed lyrics, there is more inclination towards the concept of word-per-word translation (although realized in various ways). Such translations are still understandable; that is, the meanings of the lyrics can still be grasped, but because they modify the lines, they lead to obscure albeit humorous effects.

Agent/Theme Insertion. As an alternative way of looking at words as “containers” of meaning, they can be analyzed instead using the “roles” they satisfy in a given sentence. For example, in the sentence “The child ate the cake.” In this sentence, ate is the verb, and the noun phrase involves the entities engaged in the action. Semantic roles can be identified using this kind of categorization, focusing particularly on noun phrases. In the example mentioned above, the ‘child’ performs the action, technically labeled as the agent, while the ‘cake’ is the recipient of the action, also known as the theme (Yule, 2010).

Interestingly, these semantic roles of agent and theme emerge in parts of the lines that do not originally have doers and receivers of actions. Because of this, actions and phenomena become more concrete because semantic roles are injected. Table 11 shows these instances.

Table 11

Song Lyrics with Agent/ Theme insertion

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Kind of Agent/ Patient Inserted	Shifted Semantic Field
“Bang bang, WINNIE THE POOH”	“Bang bang, into the roof”	Bang Bang	Proper noun	‘roof’- architecture To ‘Winnie the Pooh’- names and grammar
“Dont believe me, Joshua.”	“Don’t believe me just watch”	Uptown Funk	Proper noun	‘just watch’- social action, states and processes To ‘Joshua’- names and grammar
“There will always be a blue sky, a blue sky waiting tomorrow “for the pope”	“There will always be a blue sky, a blue sky waiting tomorrow full of hope”	Blue Sky	Common noun	‘hope’- general and abstract terms To ‘pope’- religion
“Cause we’ve lost it all... nothing last forever.. I’m sorry, i’m sorry.. best friend.”	“Cause we lost it all Nothin’ lasts forever I’m sorry I can’t be perfect”	Perfect	Common noun	‘perfect’- general and abstract term To ‘best friend’- social action, states and processes

These examples evidence how agents and patients are inserted in the lyrics of the song. As presented, these agents/ patients can come in the form of proper nouns or common nouns. The proper nouns may include famous characters such as Winnie the Pooh or a random name such as Joshua. The common nouns, on the other hand, may include people such as the pope or a best friend.

These agent/patient insertions substitute descriptive words such as ‘perfect’ or ‘full of hope’ or make recipients of actions more concrete rather than merely implied, like in the case of “banging” someone into the roof or making a certain “someone” believe a certain action. Because of this, semantic fields such as architecture, social action, states and processes, and general and abstract terms are shifted to names and grammar, religion, and social action, states and processes.

Abstract to Concrete Transformations. Creative use of language is pervasive in everyday life. These can be encountered in texts, media, religion, and daily conversations, such as idioms. In technical terms, the creative use of language is called figures of speech or figurative language. Barnett, Burto, and Cain (2008) defined figures of speech as a creative use of language that should not be taken literally. They are employed to accomplish various special effects. Ergo, they are the language that should not be taken literally. Some examples of these figures of speech are simile, metaphor, irony, and synecdoche, among others.

However, in the case of Mondegreens, these figurative languages sometimes become more “concrete” by transforming them into something literal and deviant from the original lines. Because of this, the song is drawn away from its intended literary effect.

The following table shows some of these examples:

Table 12

Song Lyrics with Abstract to Concrete Transformations

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Kind of Agent/Patient Inserted	Effect	Shifted Semantic Field
“I’ll never go far away from you even the sky will tell you”	“I’ll never go far away from you even this guy”	I’ll Never Go	Metaphor of divine beings is transformed to an actual person	Not absurd	‘guy’- life and living things To ‘sky’- world and environment
“I’ll be your crying soldier”	“I’ll be your crying shoulder”	I’ll Be	Synecdoche of a shoulder to represent the person which someone can approach is transformed to a soldier	Not absurd	‘soldier’- government and public To ‘shoulder’- the body and the individual

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Kind of Agent/Patient Inserted	Effect	Shifted Semantic Field
"Some people want tambourine"	"Some people want diamond rings"	If I Ain't Got You	Metaphor/ symbolism of wedding is transformed to tambourine	Absurd	'Diamond rings' (i.e. metaphor for marriage)- social action, states, and processes To 'tambourine'- entertainment, sports, and games
"When we touch don't ever let me go / Dirty dancing in the moonlight / Take me down like I'm a Governor."	"When we touch don't ever let me go / Dirty dancing in the moonlight / Take me down like I'm a domino."	Domino	Simile taken down like a domino is transformed to a governor	Absurd	'Domino'- entertainment, sports, and games, To 'governor'- government and public
"I saw the sun I saw the sun"	"I saw the sign, I saw the sign"	I Saw The Sign	Idiom (to see the sign) is transformed to the sun	Absurd	'the sign'- general and abstract terms To 'the sun'- world and environment

It is shown in Table 12 that these figurative to literal transformations can have either an absurd impact or a sensible impact on the lyrics. Although the sensible ones shift the meaning of the lines, they still retain the integrity of the lyrics and still capture the mood and emotions presented by the lyricist. Meanwhile, the absurd ones have ludicrous effects on the song which makes them illogical or humorous. Because of this, semantic fields such as life and living things, government and public, social actions, states and processes, entertainment, sports, and games, and general and abstract terms are shifted to world and environment, the body and the individual, entertainment, sports, and games, and government and public.

Additionally, in documenting this process, it can be noted that various kinds of figurative languages are transformed in the process of mondegreening. Some examples are metaphors, similes, symbolisms, and synecdoche. Even idiom, an actual application of figurative language in everyday conversation, is transformed into a literal version.

Metaphor Reconfiguration. Among the kinds of figures of speech, one of the most commonly used is the metaphor. It occurs when a comparison is implicit, describing something as if it were something else (Mays, 2018). Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson mention that metaphor is prevalent in people's daily lives- not just in language but also in behavior and ways of thinking. How people

conceptualize their experiences and the world- which guides their actions and thoughts- are essentially metaphorical (1980).

Because of this pervasiveness, people can easily manipulate and develop metaphors, thereby leading to their fluid nature. As such, these reconfigurations are also made evident in mondegreens. Interestingly, there are some rare instances wherein similes are reconfigured.

Table 13

Song Lyrics with Abstract to Reconfigured Metaphors

Mondegreen Lyrics	Original Lyrics	Song Title	Shifted Semantic Field
“All the ways of love...”	“On the wings of love...”	On The Wings Of Love	‘ways’- general and abstract term To ‘wings’- the body and the individual
“Lift your hands, baby don’t be scared”	“Lift your head, baby don’t be scared”	With A Smile	‘lift your head’- emotion To ‘lift your hands’- general and abstract term (i.e. religion)
“I’m gonna fly like a butterfly”	“I’m gonna fly like a bird through the night”	Chandelier	‘like a bird through the night’- psychological action, states, and processes To ‘like a butterfly’- life and living things

The table reveals that despite the reconfiguration of the metaphors from their original lyrics, the songs remain creative and figuratively acceptable. However, perhaps the most obvious change these reconfigurations have is their effect. For example, the metaphor of lifting one’s head, which is a symbol of resilience and positivity, and lifting one’s hands are a form of surrender to God. More so, the joyous, celebratory mood of being on the wings of love is changed to a more perplexed mood since the persona is amazed (perhaps perplexed) by the multitude of ways of love. The semantic fields shifted because of this are: general and abstract terms and emotion, to the body and the individual and general and abstract terms (i.e., religion)

The last one is the rare example of a simile that also has a comparative nature. However, it can be noticed that flying like a butterfly lessens the intensity of the comparison compared to flying like a bird through the night. This transformation caused the semantic field of psychological actions, states and processes to shift to the semantic field of life and living things.

Filipinos’ Meaning-making of the Cross-Linguistic Mondegreens

In conjunction with the findings of the previous section, it can be inferred that because of the

obscuration of the lines caused by the mondegreens, the primary effect these have on the songs is the shifting of the lyrics from their original semantic fields/ categories, such as love, freedom, intimacy, celebration, solitude, and diversity among others to humor. The websites and discussion boards from which these lyrics come are exchanges of people who find these mondegreens amusing and humorous. In this context, humor can be defined as something that elicits laughter and amusement, which can also be referred to as comedy (Warren, Barsky, & McGraw, 2020)

This could also be an indication of the happy nature of Filipinos. As supported by Osorio (2009), joyfulness is one of Filipinos' distinguishing features. Having fun comes easily to them. Such happiness is a crucial ingredient of a well-lived life. It is no wonder that the threads of these discussion boards reached thousands of message exchanges.

However, this is not to say that all mondegreens are a shift to humor since some retain their serious nature and literary appeal. Some examples are those that merely rephrase the lines, those that just lessen the impact of the songs because of metaphor reconfigurations, and more is the "concretizing" of figurative language.

Secondly, it can be observed that these mondegreens are infused with various aspects of Filipino culture, such as local celebrities, products, names, and local terminologies. As seen this way, these mondegreens not only enrich the lyrics of the songs but also nativize them through localization.

More so, given that these songs use the English language, this infusion of local concepts contributes to the indigenization or localization of the English language, thereby making it uniquely their own. As mentioned by Schneider (2011), English has undergone localization and indigenization in numerous nations. In addition to serving as a valuable "international" language, as previously mentioned, it also has significant local uses. As a result, it has taken on regional shapes and traits, and people occasionally take pleasure in utilizing it in "their own" unique ways.

In connection to the claim of localization of the English language in the Philippines, the study of Esquivel (2019) revealed that paradoxically, Filipinos have avoided using American English and have instead appropriated it for their "own" uses. Philippine English distinguishes itself from other English dialects across the globe. Furthermore, her study demonstrated how English has been localized in the Philippines, as seen by the use of innovative lexical items, localized syntax, translated idioms, and spellings. Even more, among emerging theories, language drift is a linguistic approach that explains how Philippine English came to be.

This is a testimony of the persistence of the local mind to make sense of a foreign language and the ideas or concepts enshrined within it. As such, Filipinos are active meaning-makers. They try to fashion the English language so that it is comprehensible to them and fits their culture and worldview. This is made evident in the religious reconfiguration of the lyrics (e.g., raising one's hands to God instead of lifting one's head or in the mention of the pope), the use of translations and code-switching, and even the total rephrasing of foreign slang. Also, these mondegreens give hints of the Filipinos' exposure to internationalization and modernization, which emerge in themes of sexualization, racism, and homosexuality. Lastly, these mondegreens reflect the joyful nature of Filipinos. Despite the use of gibberish, syntactic errors, sexualizations, or hyperboles, they choose to find the humor in these auditory and linguistic mishaps.

On a final note, this paper acknowledges the limitations of the discoveries that emerged from the analysis; that is, new explorations with bigger data sets, the use of other social platforms, and more diverse contributors could surely give other nuanced discoveries and information. Nevertheless, the researcher is confident that despite the other nuanced results that could emerge, this paper has

significant points that would still hold true. Since this paper primarily focused on Filipinos, the same study can be replicated by neighboring ASEAN nations to see the impact of mondegreens on their understanding of the English language. After all, one of the strengths of content analysis is its replicability. More so, music is universal, which is why they would surely have localized and unique ways of making sense of the misheard lyrics, given their diverse cultural backgrounds. As the Council on Foreign Relations (2023) mentioned, ASEAN unites nations with significant diversity- countries with diverse geographies, political systems, religions, economic backgrounds, educational systems, and languages. Thus, this paper can help shed light on how the region has “owned” the English language through alterations in music.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of this paper, it has been argued that although mondegreens have been defined as a phenomenon of auditory illusion (Scherling et al., 2022), they still have semantic implications because the lines and words are altered from their original forms. Therefore, this phenomenon has not been explored to its full potential since studies that have been done on the subject have chiefly been inclined to favor a single linguistic aspect (i.e., phonological).

Additionally, the research findings have clear implications regarding implicit and explicit meanings when these misperceptions occur. As these English lyrics traverse to another language and get modified, dynamic changes occur to their explicitness and implicitness. For example, the subtlety of certain lyrics such as “bang bang into the roof” (which has a disguised sexual meaning) becomes more explicit in the Filipino mondegreens in a way that there is a clear recipient of the action (e.g., Winnie the Pooh) or in the case of the translative process where in the more subtle way of saying love that is built on a strong foundation “love heavy like the love you’ve shown” becomes an explicit translation by saying “stone ang English ng bato ay stones.” Meanwhile, there are also plenty of cases wherein the explicit English lyrics are made implicit. For example, “Well, my girl’s in the next room sometimes I wish she was you” is an explicit confession of love, while the mondegreened lyrics give implied hints of homosexuality “Michael’s in the next room. Sometimes I wish he was you” or “I need you boo” which clearly states the speaker’s need for the listener gets transformed into an implicit way of saying that the listener is a drug addict “I need shabu.” Again, this is most likely because of the context that these lyrics are in (i.e., meanings are context-bound) and may also be attributed to the context of the listener (e.g., his/her socio-economic background, exposure to English, schema, religious background, among others).

Furthermore, the diversity of these songs is proof of the pervasiveness of these mondegreens, which is why it is significant to study them since thousands of songs are produced each year, which may all have the potential to be misheard and have different meanings. Even more, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, historical evidence would suggest that there have been many instances in history wherein ideas have been changed from their original meanings simply because of mishearing them.

Lastly, it is recommended to document these mondegreens and catch these processes because people are constantly surrounded by music. More studies can be done, not only on English songs but also on local ones. Through these scholarly works, people may have a guide on instances of linguistic creativity and even be able to map out language changes caused by songs.

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