

The Relational Nature of Language as Revealed through Anomalous and Creative Cases

*La naturaleza relacional del lenguaje revelada a través de casos
anómalos y creativos*

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Abstract

This article contrasts seven types of linguistic “marginal cases” through a relational perspective: misunderstandings, linguistic errors, conceptual errors, Freudian slips, unintended puns, intentional puns, and poetic creativity. Far from being accidental or peripheral, these phenomena reveal the structured and dynamic nature of language. Drawing on examples from English, Spanish, German, and Mapudungun, the analysis shows how phonological similarity, lexical salience, contextual conditions, and cultural background shape both intended meanings and miscommunication. While slips and errors expose the fragility of reference, poetic and playful uses highlight language’s power to create new conceptual links or even suspend oppositions. Errors and creativity thus emerge not as random accidents but as patterned outcomes of network processes that connect language, cognition, and culture. By situating the poles of error and creativity within a single framework, the article clarifies the difference between referential failure and deliberate invention. Ultimately, so-called marginal cases provide a privileged entry point into language, showing that communication is less a smooth transfer

of information than a continuous process of activation and transformation within relational networks.

Keywords: relational networks, errors, puns, slips, creativity, cognition.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el contraste entre siete tipos de "casos marginales" lingüísticos, desde una perspectiva relacional: malentendidos, errores lingüísticos y conceptuales, actos fallidos, juegos de palabras no intencionales e intencionales, y la creatividad poética. Estos fenómenos, lejos de ser accidentales o periféricos, revelan la naturaleza dinámica y estructurada del lenguaje. Basado en ejemplos en inglés, español, alemán y mapudungun, el análisis muestra cómo la similitud fonológica, la prominencia léxica, las condiciones contextuales y el trasfondo cultural moldean tanto el significado intencional como la comunicación fallida. Mientras que los lapsus y los errores exponen la fragilidad de la referencia, los usos poéticos y lúdicos resaltan el poder del lenguaje para crear nuevos vínculos conceptuales e incluso suspender oposiciones. Por lo tanto, los errores y la creatividad emergen no como accidentes aleatorios, sino como resultados previsibles de procesos de red que conectan la cognición, el lenguaje y la cultura. Al situar los polos del error y la creatividad dentro de un marco único, el artículo establece claramente la diferencia entre la falla referencial y la invención deliberada. En última instancia, estos casos marginales ofrecen un punto de acceso privilegiado al estudio del lenguaje, demostrando que la comunicación es menos una transferencia fluida de información que un proceso continuo de activación y transformación dentro de redes relacionales.

Palabras clave: redes relacionales, errores, juegos de palabras, lapsus, creatividad, procesos cognitivos.

1. Introduction

The trajectory of pragmatic theory has been shaped by a focus on intentionality and cooperation as the central coordinates of communication. Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; 1975), the Gricean paradigm (Grice, 1975; 1989), and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; 2005) have each offered powerful tools for explaining how hearers recognize speaker intentions. Yet, this orientation has often relegated anomalous or relatively marginal utterances—such as slips of the tongue, lapses, or unintended puns—to the periphery of inquiry. These

phenomena have been acknowledged in linguistic and psychological research (Freud, 1924; MacKay, 1970; Fromkin, 1971), but they rarely occupy a central role in mainstream pragmatic theorizing, which tends to idealize communication as a smooth, rational, and cooperative process.

A different picture emerges when language is approached from a Relational Perspective. The structuralist idea that linguistic meaning resides not in isolated symbols but in networks of relationships has a long genealogy, from Saussure's ([1916] 1949) foundational semiology to Hjelmslev's (1961 [1943]) theory of glossematics. Halliday (1978) further advanced this line with his systemic-functional view of language as a social semiotic, while Lamb's Relational Network Theory (1999; 2004; 2005; 2013; 2016) has provided detailed accounts of how neurocognitive connectivity underlies speech production and comprehension. In this framework, so-called marginal utterances become particularly revealing: rather than being dismissed as noise, they expose the competing activations, attentional shifts, and salience-driven processes that structure communication.

The Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) to pragmatics complements this orientation by highlighting the interaction between cooperative intention and egocentric attention (Kecskés 2006, 2008, 2010; Kecskés & Mey 2008). By acknowledging private experience and salience as integral to communication, SCA offers conceptual space for understanding how unintended or weakly implicated meanings arise in ordinary interaction. This integration makes it possible to reconsider marginal utterances not as deviations but as part of the constitutive dynamics of communication.

Within this broader landscape, Gil's (2019) study of slips of the tongue provides a useful illustration of how relational models can illuminate such phenomena. Drawing on Lamb's framework, this study analyzes several public examples of lapses to show how unintended meanings emerge from the same relational structures that support intentional communication. This contribution shows how Relational Networks can account for both

cooperative and egocentric elements, thereby situating marginal utterances within a coherent explanatory model.

Taken together, these antecedents suggest that slips, lapses, and unintended puns should not be considered as anomalies at the periphery of communication but as productive entry points into the Relational Nature of Language. By foregrounding connectivity, salience, and the interplay of individual and social factors, the relational approach repositions so-called marginal cases as central to understanding the complexity of communicative processes.

The central aim of this article is to examine the so-called "marginal cases" of language—situations in which communication does not flow smoothly, but meaning shifts, fails, or transforms in unexpected ways—from the Relational Perspective. Far from being mere anomalies or accidental errors, these phenomena are crucial for understanding how language operates as an interconnected network linking cognition, sociocultural context, and linguistic structure, and more importantly, they provide the clearest opportunity to distinguish between referential failure and deliberate invention.

To illustrate this thesis, seven types of phenomena are analyzed throughout this work: misunderstandings, linguistic and conceptual errors, Freudian slips, unintended and intentional puns, and poetic creativity. These cases are formally modeled and analyzed sequentially in the dedicated Data Analysis section (Section 3). The examples are drawn from diverse corpora in Spanish, English, German, and Mapudungun, allowing for a multifaceted view of the network mechanisms.

The analysis focuses on applying network notation to map the activation, inhibition, and convergence of conceptual, lexico-grammatical, and phonological nodes in real-time. This approach demonstrates that the network of relationships constituting the linguistic system is the condition of possibility for both successful communication and its deviations. In

particular, the cases studied reveal the exact mechanisms by which emotional or contextual salience can override the intended interpretation, and how the poetic function of language can suspend conceptual oppositions.

In sum, misunderstandings, errors, slips, and creativity are not irrelevant phenomena, but privileged windows that expose both the limits and the immense transformative and relational power of language.

The trajectory of pragmatic, structuralist, and cognitive approaches has consistently shown that language phenomena, even those on the margins, are highly structured. By using Relational Network notation, we seek to provide a precise, structural account of these "anomalous" cases, moving beyond merely classifying them to understanding their underlying network mechanics.

In this sense, the central objectives of this article are:

- To formulate a relational framework: To articulate a unified, socio-cognitive framework, grounded in Relational Network theory, capable of modeling both effective communication and its deviations (errors and creativity) as structured processes of node activation.
- To delimit operational concepts: To establish a clear, operational distinction between the various forms of referential failure (slips, linguistic errors, conceptual errors, Freudian slips) and deliberate invention (puns, poetic creativity).
- To demonstrate structural causality: To utilize formal Relational Network diagrams to show that referential failure and linguistic creativity are not random occurrences, but rather predictable structural outcomes of phonological similarity, conceptual proximity, and contextual salience within the network.
- To compare error and invention: To structurally compare the mechanisms of non-intentional activation (error) and intentional mobilization (creativity) within the same network model,

illustrating the role of inhibition suspension in generating poetic meaning.

- To argue for apparently marginal cases as central: To argue that these supposedly marginal cases (anomalies) offer a privileged methodology for studying the underlying relational nature of language and its interface with cognition and culture.

Ultimately, this article aims to clarify the structural difference between referential failure, where an unintended path is activated, and deliberate invention, where multiple paths are intentionally leveraged for communicative effect

2. Methodology and analytical framework

This study is qualitative and theoretical-illustrative in nature. It does not employ statistical tests or quantitative corpus analysis; therefore, its findings are limited to illustrating an explanatory framework and do not aim for population inferences. The core objective is to illuminate the internal dynamics of the Relational Network model through detailed, linguistic case studies.

2.1. Materials and traceability (Illustrative corpus)

The analysis is based on a diverse corpus of seven distinct linguistic phenomena, selected not for statistical representativeness, but for their structural capacity to illuminate the relational dynamics of language. The materials are drawn from English, Spanish (River Plate dialect), German, and Mapudungun, allowing for a multilingual validation of the relational network mechanisms.

The specific cases used for the structural analysis are detailed below, providing the necessary documentation for traceability, commensurate with the nature of the evidence:

Table 1: Illustrative Case Corpus

7,5		Short description, language	Source
1	Misunderstanding Attorney: Mrs. Jones, is your appearance here this morning pursuant to a deposition notice which I sent to your attorney? Witness: No. This is how I dress when I go to work.	Anecdotal: <i>Look vs. Appearance</i> , English	Lederer (1987; Lamb, 1999)
2	Linguistic Error a medida que uno fue ganando cosas, ... <u>uno se hamburguesa</u> as I started winning things, ... <u>one hamburger</u> [instead of <i>becomes bourgeois</i>]	Tévez's use of <i>hamburguesa</i> instead of <i>aburguesa</i> , Spanish	Link Youtube Tévez
3	Conceptual error Hay una especie de cultura del machismo que parte de cosas tan básicas como llamar a los intendentes <i>varones</i> del Conurbano There is a kind of culture of machismo that stems from things as basic as calling the mayors <i>males</i> of the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area.	Kicillof's confusion of <i>varones</i> and <i>barones</i> , Spanish	Link Youtube Kicillof
4	Freudian slip Están molestos porque les estamos afanando los choreos. They're upset because we're stealing their steals.	Milei's use of <i>afanando</i> , Spanish	Link Youtube Milei
5	Unintended pun Teacher: What do you know about Hegel? Student: I have no idea.	High School Class: Hegel's <i>Idea</i> , English	Personal communication
6	Intentional Pun Brand name <i>Schnapsidee</i> ,	Brand name <i>Schnapsidee</i> , German	Link Instagram Schnapsidee
7	Poetic Creativity Iñchiñ Mapu Kúme Ûlkantun Müley Ñi Wenu Mapu The song of our good earth is in its land above	Mapuche Poetic Worldview, Mapudungun	Elicura Chihualaf's poem, in Spanish , and personal communication

Fuente: elaboración propia

2.2. Selection criteria for illustrative cases

The seven cases analyzed were selected based on the following specific criteria:

- Representativeness of the phenomenon: Each case had to be a representative example of one of the seven "marginal cases" identified (e.g., a pure phonological error, a precise conceptual confusion, a clear unintended pun, etc.).
- Public and verifiable availability: The public slips and errors (from politicians and media figures) were chosen because they were widely documented and verifiable, ensuring the reliability of the linguistic incident.

2.3. Analysis procedure and notation

The construction of the Relational Network (RN) diagrams for the illustrative cases follows a systematic procedure, formalizing the analytical pipeline:

- 1 Identification and contextualization: The analysis begins by identifying the anomalous or creative linguistic event and establishing its linguistic context, including the speaker's presumed intended meaning and the resulting actual meaning (whether a slip, error, or intended creation).
- 2 Mapping of linguistic levels: The relevant levels of the linguistic system are mapped, including conceptual nodes, lexico-grammatical nodes, and phonological nodes.
- 3 Tracing activation pathways: The activation path is traced from the speaker's intention (conceptual level) through the lexico-grammatical nodes to the phonological output (production), or from the phonological input to the conceptual interpretation (comprehension). The choice between narrow (directional, e.g., Figure 1) or compact (bidirectional, e.g., Figure 2) notation is made based on the need to emphasize production/interpretation dynamics or the underlying structural relations, respectively.

- 4 Modeling Relational Dynamics: Key network mechanisms are formalized. Polysemy and homophony, for example, are represented by a single lexical/phonological node connecting upwards to multiple conceptual nodes (polysemy, e.g., *appearance*) or a single phonological node connecting to distinct lexical nodes (homophony, e.g., *barones/varones*). Inhibition is modeled to represent for example antonymic or mutually exclusive concepts/lexemes, which are linked by inhibitory connections, represented by "hooks" (e.g., between *mapu* and *wenu mapu*). Threshold Nodes (n) are conceptual-level nodes represented by semicircles containing the variable n to signify the necessary minimum number of incoming connections required for activation, formalizing how salience or context overrides competing meanings.
- 5 Contrast and Classification: The final network structure is contrasted with the normative, expected network. This contrast serves to structurally distinguish between referential failure (where the network activates an unintended node, compromising propositional truth) and deliberate invention (where the network is intentionally mobilized, often by inhibiting constraints, to generate a new or enriched meaning).

2.4. Analytical method: Relational Network (RN) notation

The primary analytical tool employed is **Relational Network (RN) notation**, as developed by Lamb (1999; 2005; 2013). This method is used to formally diagram the activation and interaction of linguistic and conceptual units (nodes) in real-time communication.

- *Micro-analysis*: The notation maps the connectivity between conceptual, lexico-grammatical, and phonological nodes.
- *Directional activation*: For a specific case (misunderstanding in Figure 1), narrow notation is used to show unidirectional activation (downward for production, upward for interpretation).
- *Abstract/compact Notation*: For the majority of cases (Figures 2-7), compact, bidirectional notation is used to represent the

underlying structural relations that condition both successful communication and its deviations.

- Network Dynamics: The diagrams illustrate key network phenomena such as:
 - Convergence: How multiple pathways (phonological and conceptual) activate a single node, leading to errors (e.g., *aburguesa* vs. *hamburguesa*).
 - Salience/Precedence: How contextual or emotional factors can pre-activate a network, causing an alternative meaning to override the intended one (e.g., *appearance* vs. *look*; *afanando* vs. *robando*).
 - Inhibition and Suspension: How the activation of one node blocks another (e.g., the antonymy between *mapu* and *wenu mapu*) and, conversely, how the poetic function can inhibit this mutual constraint to generate conceptual synthesis (Figure 7c).

By modeling these phenomena as activation within a unified network, the methodology allows for a structural comparison between referential failure (error) and deliberate invention (creativity), which is one of the aims of this article.

Drawing on Lamb's Relational Network (RN) theory, the present analysis utilizes the network diagrams as a formal and interpretive model of the linguistic system. While the framework is designed to be compatible with neurocognitive evidence regarding interconnected nodes and activation spreading, it operates primarily at the level of linguistic structure modeling, and does not pretend to offer a direct, one-to-one mapping of the speaker's neural architecture. The purpose of the RN notation here is strictly to visualize and analyze the structural causes of linguistic phenomena, both normative and anomalous.

3. Data analysis: Relational modeling of seven apparently marginal phenomena

3.1. An example of misunderstanding

In the very first chapter of *Pathways of the Brain*, Lamb (1999, p. 9) suggests that most current linguistics fails when considering different types of anomalous utterances which in fact reveal very valuable information about the structure and the function of the mental system underlying our linguistic abilities, for example slips of the tongue, errors, unintentional puns, etc. In Chapter 11, entitled “Traveling the Pathways”, Lamb (1999, pp. 202-203) analyzes the following case of misunderstanding, taken from Lederer (1987).

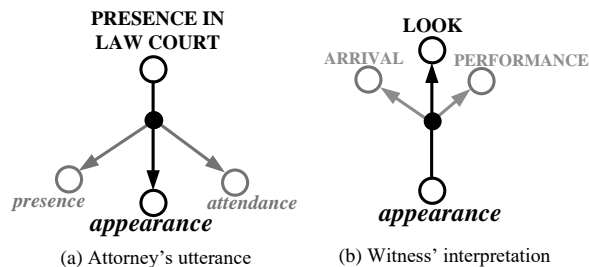
(1) Attorney: Mrs. Jones, is your appearance here this morning pursuant to a deposition notice which I sent to your attorney?

Witness: No. This is how I dress when I go to work.

Figure 1 accounts for this case of misunderstanding on the basis of the fundamental resources of narrow notation. Figure 1(a) represents that the concept or idea corresponding for the node whose label is PRESENCE IN LAW COURT sends activation to the lexical node whose label is *appearance*.

On the other hand, Figure 1(b) accounts for the fact that, in the neurocognitive system of the witness, the recognition of the lexeme *appearance* sends activation to the concept LOOK. Nodes and lines in gray represent respectively nodes and lines that are part of the networks of these two persons but that have not been activated in production, represented in Figure 1(a), or interpretation, represented in Figure 1 (b).

Figure 1: (a) Attorney's production of *appearance* and (b) witness' interpretation



Fuente: elaboración propia.

It may be relevant to mention that Figure 1(a) also helps to account for synonymy, i.e., the connection between one conceptual node and more than one lexical node. In this case, it is shown that *presence*, *appearance*, and *attendance* are synonyms by means of which it is possible to evoke the meaning PRESENCE IN LAW COURT.

On the other hand, it may be also worth to signal that Figure 1(b) serves to account for polysemy, i.e. the connection between one lexical node and more than one conceptual node. In this case, it is shown that the lexical node for *appearance* connects upwards with different meanings, like LOOK, ARRIVAL, PERFORMANCE.

This concrete misunderstanding stems from the polysemy of the word *appearance*. The attorney uses it in its legal sense, PRESENCE IN LAW COURT, a meaning that is routinely accessible in the specialized network of concepts activated in a legal context. For the attorney, this network is the salient one, and the utterance is thus straightforward.

For the witness, however, the word *appearance* activates a different network, as shown in Figure 1(b). Because personal appearance is often emotionally charged, this conceptual network was already primed and easily triggered. As soon as she heard *appearance*, the association with clothing and external look dominated her interpretation, making the attorney's legal sense inaccessible in real time.

Cognitive and emotional factors reinforced the misinterpretation. The legal phrasing *pursuant to a deposition notice* was probably unfamiliar to her, leaving a gap in processing. At the same time, her sensitivity regarding appearance as clothing, tinged with emotion, drew her attention away from the larger legal context that could have constrained the meaning. The emotional salience of one network overpowered the contextual salience of the other.

Thus, while the attorney's utterance and the witness's response both relied on legitimate meanings of *appearance*, their respective conceptual networks failed to converge. The legal sense, transparent to the attorney,

was inaccessible to the witness, who instead activated the personal and everyday sense. By the time the unfamiliar legal phrase was processed, the everyday interpretation was already dominant, guiding her humorous but unintended reply.

3.2. An example of a linguistic error

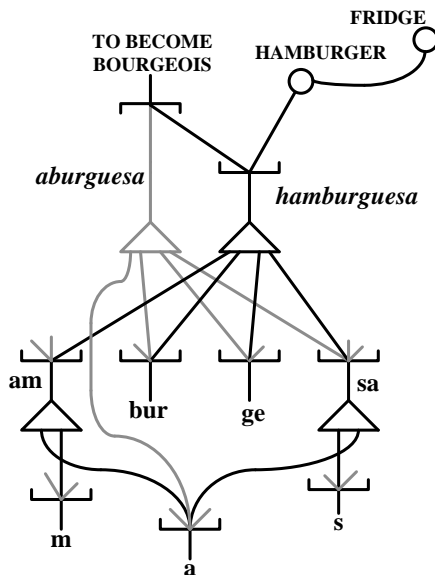
A well-known example of linguistic error occurred during a 2017 interview with Argentinean football player Carlitos Tévez. While reflecting on the social and economic changes brought about by his professional success, Tévez stated:

- (2) a medida que uno fue ganando cosas, y llenando la heladera de la casa, y comprándole, pudiéndole comprar la casa a mi viejo, a mis hermanos, y sacar a la gente que uno quiere del barrio, y darle a mis tíos, y poder que mis sobrinos tengan un estudio mejor que el que tuvo uno, uno se hamburguesa, llega a la heladera, decís “está llena”, mis hijos están bien, y ya te empieza a costar ir a entrenar.

as I started winning things, filling the fridge at home, buying a house for my dad, helping my siblings, getting the people you love out of the neighborhood, and giving something to my uncles, giving my nieces and nephews a better study environment than I had, *one hamburger* [instead of *becomes bourgeois*], one goes to the fridge, and you say “it’s full”, my kids are fine; and it’s starting to get difficult for you to go training.

The Spanish expression that Tévez intended to utter is *se aburguesa*, whose meaning can be paraphrased as “to become bourgeois” or to adopt the habits of the middle and upper classes. Instead, he produced the word *hamburguesa* (“hamburger”), which is unrelated at the conceptual level but very strongly connected at the phonological level.

This case can be considered as a linguistic error because the speaker activated an inadequate lexical node, instead of the lexical node that would have been activated by a typical speaker of standard Spanish.

Figure 2: Linguistic error: performance of *hamburguesa* instead of *aburguesa*.

Fuente: elaboración propia.

From a relational perspective, the error can be understood as the convergence of at least three phenomena, all of them represented in Figure 2, which makes use of the strategies and conventions of compact or abstract notation. Unlike networks in narrow notation (like the ones in Figure 1), compact or abstract relational networks are bidirectional, i.e., they represent both linguistic production (downward activation, from meaning to phonology) and linguistic comprehension (upward direction, from phonology to meaning)

- 1 Phonological constituency. Both the lexical nodes *aburguesa* and *hamburguesa* connect to the nodes for the syllables /bur/, /ge/, and /sa/. The convergence of these phonological pathways (including rhyme) makes the slip more likely.
- 2 Lexical frequency and accessibility. In everyday speech, *hamburguesa* is far more common than the relatively infrequent and socially marked *aburguesa*. Under conditions of cognitive load (public speaking, media attention), the node for the more

familiar lexical item was more strongly activated. This is why the node and the connections involving *aburguesa* (to become a bourgeois) are represented in light gray.

- 3 Cognitive representation of the social and economic context. Tévez was narrating a trajectory of upward mobility, describing how he “filled the fridge” and provided material improvements for his family. These concepts were perfectly aligned with *aburguesa*, yet the phonological competitor *hamburguesa* intruded. In this sense, the previous mention of *fridge* could have helped to promote the activation of concepts dealing with food, HAMBURGER among them. The humorous effect arises precisely from this clash between the intended register (dealing with social ascent) and the accidental register (dealing with popular fast food).

The public reaction amplified the relational dynamics of the error because of the incongruity between serious social reflection and a trivial food. Social media users circulated jokes and parodies that played on the unexpected substitution, turning a minor linguistic accident into a cultural event.

In relational terms, the football player’s slip exemplifies how phonological constituency, lexical salience, and contextual pressure may interact to generate errors that are not random, but structured. The case illustrates that linguistic errors are not merely individual lapses but also socially mediated events whose meanings emerge at the intersection of the neurocognitive system and culture.

3.3. An example of conceptual error

A notable example of a conceptual error occurred when Axel Kicillof, the governor of Buenos Aires Province (the largest and the most populated province in Argentina), confused the terms *barones* (*barons*) and *varones* (*men*) in a public speech about gender and politics. This slip not only revealed a lack of linguistic precision but also demonstrated a significant

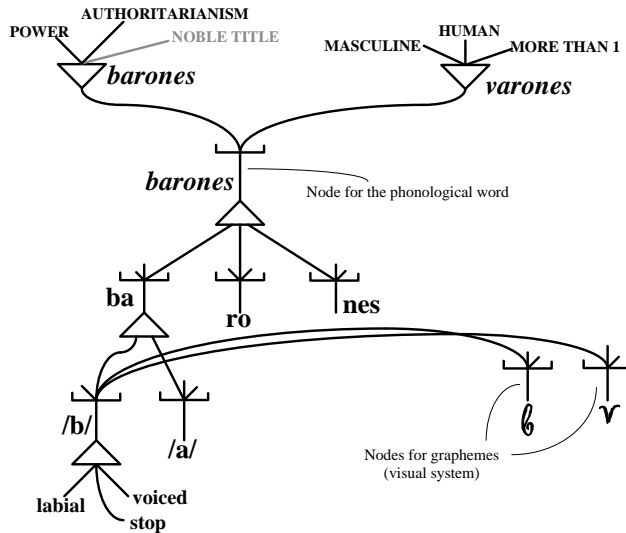
misunderstanding of the political and cultural phenomenon he intended to critique.

- (3) Hay una especie de cultura del machismo que parte de cosas tan básicas como llamar a los intendentes *varones* del Conurbano.

There is a kind of culture of machismo that stems from things as basic as calling the mayors *males* of the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area.

The words *barón* and *varón* are perfect homophones in Spanish, *barón* refers to a noble title or, in Argentinean political jargon, to powerful local leaders known as the *barons of the Greater Buenos Aires area*. *Varón*, in contrast, refers neutrally to a human male, without the undesirable gender connotations carried by *macho*.

Figure 3(a): Distinction of *barones* (barons) and *varones* (males) in the system of a typical standard Spanish speaker, including graphemic nodes



Fuente: elaboración propia.

Figure 3(a) illustrates how the linguistic system of a typical Spanish speaker and reader distinguishes between *barones* and *varones*. The diagram shows several interconnected levels of representation. At the top, conceptual nodes

associate *barones* with POWER, AUTHORITARIANISM, and NOBLE TITLE (whose activation may be weaker when considering local politics); *varones* is linked to HUMAN, MASCULINE, MORE THAN ONE.

In the middle lies the phonological word node, which organizes the syllabic sequence *ba-ro-nes*. Each syllable connects with phonemes (/b/, /a/, etc.), represented by articulatory features (/b/ = labial, voiced, plosive). On the lower right appear the graphemic nodes of the visual system, where the graphemes *b* and *v* are distinguished in writing but converge in the same phonological node, since in Spanish there is no phonological distinction between /b/ and /v/.

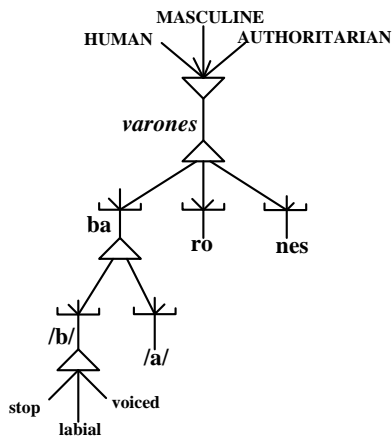
Thus, Figure 3(a) makes explicit how the linguistic network integrates nodes for graphemes (visual system), nodes for phonemes, syllables, and phonological words (phonological level), nodes for lexemes (lexico-grammatical level), and concepts (conceptual level).

The confusion between *barones* and *varones* occurs when activation within the semantic network shifts from one node to another close in graphic and phonological form, showing that communication depends on this complex interconnection of perceptual, cognitive, and linguistic systems.

By using *varones* (*men*) instead of *barones* (*barons*), Kicillof committed more than a linguistic mistake. He inadvertently altered the meaning of his statement, conflating an analysis of political power structures with a general reference to male gender. While criticizing the so-called *barons of the Greater Buenos Aires area*, Kicillof referred instead to *men*, thereby undermining the specificity of his critique.

The mistake was widely circulated in the press and on social media, eliciting both criticism and ridicule. In response, Kicillof claimed it was a minor slip of the tongue and that his speech had been misinterpreted. Nevertheless, errors of this kind in public figures may cast doubt on their preparedness and their grasp of the issues at stake.

Figure 3(b): Collapse of the distinction between *barones* (*barons*) and *varones* (*males*) in the governor's linguistic system



Fuente: elaboración propia.

Figure 3(b) schematizes this slip by depicting a severely reduced network, illustrating how the speaker's relational system leads to an emphatic referential failure by failing to distinguish between *barones* (political leaders) and *varones* (males). Unlike Figure 3(a), which shows fully differentiated conceptual and lexical nodes, the diagram reveals that in his speech there is only one lexical node for *varones*, which is connected to concepts such as a MALE, AUTHORITARIAN. This network suggests a profound collapse in conceptual differentiation: for the governor, the politically charged expression *barones* appears to have been processed as the neutral and purely biological *varones*. The error exposes a striking deficiency in his discourse-level mapping of linguistic forms onto socially and politically meaningful categories, resulting in a literal conflation of gender and political authority. Far from a minor slip, Figure 3(b) captures that the governor's lexical and conceptual network failed to activate distinctions critical to understanding power, hierarchy, and political nuance, with immediate consequences for interpretation in a sensitive political context.

This case illustrates how a conceptual error like confusing a political category with a gender category can distort meaning and weaken the effectiveness of communication. It underscores the importance of linguistic precision and

conceptual clarity, especially when addressing complex topics such as gender and political power.

3.4. An example of Freudian slip

A Freudian slip, or parapraxis, is an error in speech, memory, or action that is interpreted as being caused by a suppressed unconscious wish, thought, or emotion. According to Freudian theory, these slips reveal the true, underlying intentions of the speaker or actor. The present example offers an instructive case of such a slip in a high-stakes political context. Javier Milei, the President of Argentina, produced an astonishing Freudian slip during a speech on August 25, 2025. While referring to the opposition political faction, he declared:

(4) Están molestos porque les estamos afanando los choreos.

They're upset because we're stealing their steals.

The phrase quickly went viral across social media and news outlets, immediately interpreted as an inadvertent admission of corruption within his own administration. In Argentinean slang, the noun *choreo* evokes THEFT and, more specifically, an act of political corruption. Thus, Milei's formulation suggested his government was engaging in the same illicit behavior he attributed to his political rivals. This slip was particularly damaging because it occurred while his administration was under intense scrutiny due to bribery and kickback accusations involving his sister and presidential secretary, Karina Milei.

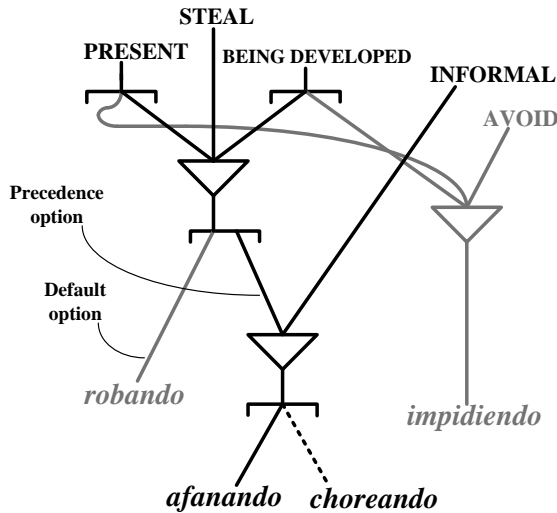
From a neurocognitive perspective on language production, this error is highly revealing. Figure 4 illustrates the lexical activation process that led to the evocation of unintended meanings. The core meaning of STEAL received significantly greater activation than the alternative semantic pathway, AVOID, which would have been the intended meaning.

In addition, the President's rhetorical style is heavily characterized by the use of vulgarities, insults, and colloquial expressions—a strategy he employs to signal proximity to "the people" and reject the conventions of traditional politics. This personal stylistic choice directly impacts the lexical selection by

precedence. Milei's habitual use of aggressive, informal language creates a stylistic precedence for high-frequency, colloquial synonyms. This preference steered the activation towards the STEAL meaning and specifically by the intervention of INFORMAL register. Consequently, the highly informal verb *afanando* (a slang term for 'stealing') was selected, overriding the default option *robando*. The phrase *afanando* (stealing) then strongly influenced the subsequent, related noun *choreo* (steal/corruption), reinforcing the Freudian slip.

Thus, Figure 4 represents how the stylistic and semantic pathways interacted, showing the precedence option (*afanando*) being chosen over the default option (*robando*).

Figure 4: Conceptual and lexical activation network for Milei's Freudian slip



Fuente: elaboración propia.

This Freudian slip is thus not merely a political embarrassment but an important case study in how lexical activation and personal stylistic preferences interact. It exemplifies how a preferred colloquial register can override conceptual appropriateness, producing an utterance that is linguistically coherent but politically disastrous.

3.5. An example of unintended pun

Consider now the following classroom exchange, reported by an American high-school teacher:

(5) Teacher: What do you know about Hegel?

Student: I have no idea.

At first sight, this seems like nothing more than a teenager's candid admission of ignorance about a notoriously difficult philosopher. In everyday English, *I have no idea* simply means *I don't know*. Yet in this particular philosophical context, the expression inadvertently acquires a second meaning.

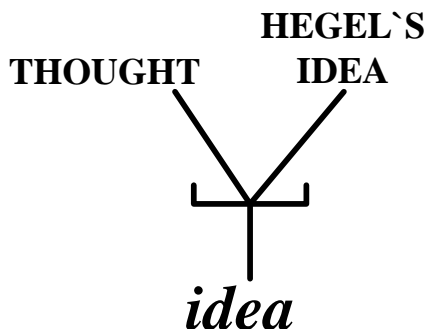
In Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the *Idea* (*die Idee*) does not refer to a passing thought or a mere opinion. It designates the highest philosophical category: the unity of concept (*Begriff*) and reality, the realization of truth in the world. For Hegel, the *Idea* is the point at which what is thought and what exists fully coincide.

This is why the student's reply, although completely innocent, can humorously be read as the negation or the declination of the very cornerstone of Hegel's system. By declaring *I have no Idea*, the student unwittingly produces a double meaning. On one level, he voices everyday ignorance; on another, he appears to deny or make fun of Hegel's most central notion. Figure 5 represents how the lexical node for *idea* sends activation both to the concepts labeled as THOUGHT and HEGEL'S IDEA in the neurocognitive system of a person who does interpret the unintended pun, for example, the Philosophy teacher. Hearer's interpretation creates a structure where philosophical depth and colloquial humor intersect.

What makes this example particularly revealing is that the pun does not depend on the student's intention at all. Its force lies entirely in the act of interpretation: the hearer, not the speaker, perceives the unexpected philosophical echo. This shows that unintended puns are generated not by

conscious creativity but by the relational interplay between language, context, and interpretation.

Figure 5: Unintended pun on Hegel's Idea



Fuente: elaboración propia.

Meaning here is less a matter of what the speaker meant than of what the listener is able to interpret.

3.6. An example of intentional pun

A liquor store in Potsdam, Germany, named Schnapsidee, provides a clever example of an intentional pun:

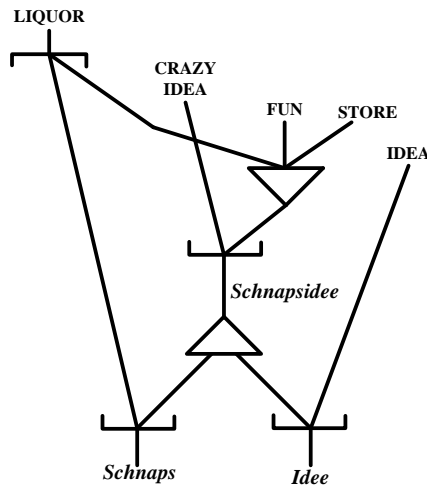
(6) *Schnapsidee*

The compound is formed from *Schnaps* (“liquor, strong spirit”) and *Idee* (“idea”). From a morphological perspective, *-Idee* is the semantic head of the compound, which determines its grammatical gender (feminine: *die Schnapsidee*) and plural form (*Schnapsideen*). Lexicographically, dictionaries register the figurative meaning as “a foolish, absurd, or crazy idea,” highlighting the cultural assumption that such ideas arise under the influence of alcohol.

The name of the liquor store displays a striking duality. On the one hand, its literal composition points to an “idea linked to schnaps.” On the other, idiomatic usage fixes the figurative sense of “nonsensical or harebrained idea.”

Figure 6 illustrates this conceptual layering. First of all, there is “shadow meaning” (Lamb, 2005) because the compound lexical node is integrated by the morphological nodes *Schnaps* and *Idee*, which are connected upwards to the concepts LIQUOR and IDEA, respectively. Such shadow meaning, which combines alcohol and intoxication with the domain and thought, is the base of the intended pun created by the name of the store. In its turn, the lexical node for *Schnapsidee* is connected not only to the meaning CRAZY IDEA but also to the meanings that are evoked by the associations, like LIQUOR, FUN, STORE. All these convergences evoke a sense of “store as a crazy idea.”

Figure 6: Intended pun based on the German compound *Schnapsidee*



Fuente: elaboración propia.

Because of its morphological transparency and semantic richness, *Schnapsidee* is highly productive pun. The choice deliberately exploits both the idiomatic meaning (“crazy idea”) and the literal meaning (“idea involving schnaps”). Unlike unintended puns, here the humor depends on intentional design. **The creativity lies precisely in this oscillation: linguistically, in the way morphology and semantics interact to keep both readings active; and commercially, in the way this linguistic play is harnessed as a memorable brand name. In this sense, the pun operates simultaneously as a**

demonstration of linguistic inventiveness and as a tool of market-oriented creativity.

In contrast to the English classroom example (*I have no idea*), where the pun emerges unintentionally and depends entirely on the interpreter's sensitivity, *Schnapsidee* illustrates the opposite case: an intended pun whose force comes from deliberate design. The German compound is playful by nature, and when used as the name of a liquor store it consciously activates both its idiomatic and literal readings. The comparison highlights a crucial distinction: unintended puns reveal the openness of language to unforeseen interpretations, while intended puns showcase how speakers (as brand creators) can exploit morphological transparency, semantic layering, and cultural associations to craft memorable effects. Together, the two cases demonstrate the double potential of puns—as accidents of interpretation and as products of creative intention.

3.7. An example of poetic creativity in Mapudungun

Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche people, is a polysynthetic and agglutinative language spoken primarily in southern Chile and Argentina. The very name means the language (*dungun*) of the land (*mapu*), **underscoring the profound link** between speech, territory, and worldview (Painequeo Paillán, Salamanca Gutiérrez & Berrios Castillo, 2025).

In Mapudungun, lexical compounds often encapsulate entire cosmological perspectives: terms such as *wenu mapu* (“land above, sky”) or *iñchiñ mapu* (“our land”) integrate spatial, social, and ethical dimensions into a single expression. Contemporary poetry written in this language thus does not simply ornament thought, but rather crystallizes a worldview in which earth, sky, community, and the sacred are interwoven.

Within this tradition, the work of Elicura Chihuailaf is paramount. Recognized with the National Prize for Literature in Chile (2020), Chihuailaf is not only a poet but also a cultural mediator who has brought Mapudungun poetry into dialogue with Spanish and the global literary canon. His bilingual writing is marked by an ethos of translation: he renders Mapuche oral imagery into

poetic Spanish while preserving the resonance of the original language. For Chihuailaf, poetry (*ülkantun*) is inseparable from song, ceremony, and community memory, and functions as a medium that bridges worlds (Mellado, 2014; Godoy, 2019; Torres Saavedra & García Orellana, 2019; Stocco, 2022; Rodríguez Sierra, 2023).

To illustrate the mechanism by which Mapuche poetry integrates seemingly opposed concepts, we present a highly creative and spontaneous production in Mapudungun. The example analyzed (7) is a spontaneous poetic interpretation of Chihuailaf's widely recognized Spanish statement: '*En este suelo habitan las estrellas*' (In this soil dwell the stars). When asked for a plausible Mapudungun translation of this verse, a bilingual Spanish-Mapudungun speaker (whose anonymity will be preserved and whom we call Aiken) produced the following utterance:

(7) Iñichiñ Mapu Küme Ülkantun Müley Ñi Wenu Mapu |

1PL.POSS land.ABS good.ADJ song.N be.V 3SG.POSS up.ABS land.ABS

The song of our good earth is in its land above/sky.

It must be emphasized that this specific line is a free interpretation created spontaneously. While not being an original verse of Elicura Chihuailaf's, it is consistent not only with his poetic conception but also with the global Mapuche worldview.

The deliberate selection of this example is, in itself, an act of methodological consistency that mirrors the phenomenon under study: the unexpected and spontaneous appearance of linguistic creativity. The fact that this synthesis of opposing concepts (*mapu/wenu mapu*) was generated in real-time, under pressure, provides an epistemologically privileged window into the spontaneous mobilization of relational networks, exactly as a Freudian slip does for unintended activations.

For the purpose of linguistic analysis, the accompanying translations and glosses adhere to standard academic practices for indigenous languages,

specifically adopting the Leipzig Glossing Rules (or a simplified version thereof) to ensure maximum transparency and replicability of the structural analysis (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel, 2015).

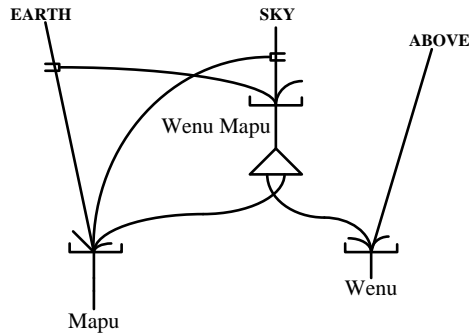
The structural composition of the phrase is detailed in Figure 7(a). The analysis helps to illustrate how spatial and cosmological dimensions are condensed into lexical units, for example *wenu mapu* (“above land, sky”). Then, Figure 7(b) shows the lexical and conceptual relations between *mapu* (earth) and *wenu mapu* (sky).

Figure 7(a): Morphemic gloss of line (7) in Mapudungun.

Iñchiñ	mapu	küme	ülkantun	müley	ñi	wenu	mapu
						<u>above</u>	<u>land</u>
Our	earth	good	song	is	its		sky

Fuente: elaboración propia.

Figure 7(b): Relation between *mapu*, *wenu*, and the compound *wenu mapu*



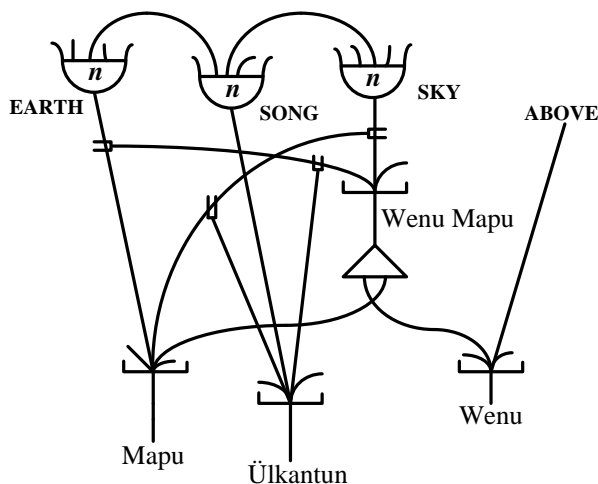
Fuente: elaboración propia.

In Figure 7(b) earth and sky appear as opposed and mutually inhibiting terms: what is below versus what is above. The inhibitory “hooks” in the diagram make this relative antonymy explicit, showing that the activation of one concept blocks the activation of the other.

Now, Figure 7(c) introduces the element *ülkantun* (song/poetry). Once this new node enters the network, it reconfigures the system of oppositions. The node for *ülkantun*/song inhibits the very inhibitions between *mapu*

and *wenu mapu*. In other words, Mapuche metaphysics suspends the antonymic relation between earth and sky, allowing them to mirror one another. What is above reflects what is below, and vice versa. Semicircles containing an n represent conceptual-level threshold nodes. A node is activated once n incoming connections are received. In this instance, the nodes representing earth and sky are linked via the node corresponding to song.

Figure 7(c): Extended network including *ülkantun* ("song")



Fuente: elaboración propia.

The poetic version written by Elicura Chihuailaf, "In this soil dwell the stars," renders this creative effect explicit: stars, belonging to the celestial domain, are placed within the earth. What initially seemed incompatible (earth/sky, below/above) becomes integrated. This linguistic act dissolves contradiction and produces a reconciliatory vision where both realms coexist in unity.

From a relational perspective, this instance of poetic creativity does not simply blur oppositional structures but suspends them altogether. At the lexical level, the poetic function plays with antonymy, while at the conceptual level it neutralizes incompatibility, producing a synthesis that is paradoxical yet meaningful. Comparable to the rhetorical figure of the

oxymoron, this mechanism shows how poetry mobilizes language to disarm oppositions and reconfigure them as imaginative possibilities.

The spontaneity of Aiken's creation reinforces this methodological conclusion. As a creative act generated in real-time, it demonstrates that the network's capacity to suspend inhibition is not limited to canonical and deliberate poetry but is a dynamic and spontaneously activatable process, just as occurs with a slip. Beyond its rhetorical effect, the verse embodies a cultural worldview in which earth and sky are not conceived as irreconcilable opposites but as dimensions that can resonate with one another. Chihuailaf's formulation translates into poetry a relational ontology typical of Mapuche thought, where natural and cosmic realms are intertwined rather than separated by rigid frontiers. This perspective stands in sharp contrast with the dualisms characteristic of Western metaphysics (earth/heaven, matter/spirit, below/above).

In this context, relational analysis is crucial. It not only allows us to map the lexical and conceptual mechanisms that suspend antonymy but also makes visible how these linguistic operations are inseparable from a broader cosmovision. By showing how *ülkantun* (song/poetry) can inhibit inhibitions and thus integrate the incompatible, relational analysis illuminates the very dynamics through which Mapuche metaphysics projects an inclusive vision of the world. In this way, relational analysis becomes not merely a linguistic tool but a methodological bridge toward understanding a cultural conception that privileges interconnection over division.

3.8. A note on linguistic and conceptual errors

Political discourse provides fertile ground for examining linguistic and cognitive deviations, particularly when speakers communicate extemporaneously. Politicians often produce grammatical slips, malapropisms, neologisms, and conceptual confusions. While such deviations are frequently trivialized in popular media, they reveal the cognitive demands and discursive constraints of real-time communication.

They also shed light on how leaders negotiate meaning, signal ideological stances, and manage public perception under pressure.

Former U.S. President George W. Bush offers a compelling case study. His idiosyncratic speech patterns, commonly referred to as “Bushisms,” encompass unconventional syntax, semantic errors, and inventive lexical formations. These utterances illustrate both the fragility and the resilience of linguistic processing in high-stakes contexts.

- 8.1. Rarely is the question asked: Is our children learning?
- 8.2. Neither in French nor in English nor in Mexican.
- 8.3. We ought to make the pie higher.
- 8.4. They underestimated me.
- 8.5. I’ll be long gone before some smart person ever figures out what happened inside this Oval Office.

In (8.1), the plural noun *children* is paired incorrectly with the singular verb *is* instead of *are*. This subject–verb disagreement demonstrates how even statements framed in formal public contexts may contain subtle grammatical slips that undermine perceived linguistic authority.

In (8.2), Bush conflates nationality with language, mistakenly using *Mexican* to mean *Spanish*.

His tendency toward misapplied metaphor is evident in (8.3), which likely intended to convey the idea of expanding the “economic pie.” The literal interpretation creates a nonsensical image, showing how figurative language can introduce vagueness or imprecision.

The neologism in (8.4) blends *misunderstood* and *underestimated*. Although nonstandard, it communicates the intended meaning effectively, revealing spontaneous lexical creativity under cognitive pressure.

Finally, (8.5) exemplifies Bush’s use of self-deprecating humor. Although grammatically correct, the utterance deploys irony to navigate high-stakes discourse and manage audience perception.

Analogously, one might identify in River Plate Spanish a set of recurrent slips—that some reporter playfully labeled *kiciladas*—in the discourse of Buenos Aires governor Axel Kicillof. These include grammatical mistakes, conceptual misclassifications, and improvised neologisms:

8.6. ¡Nunca más docentes y docentas tomados como enemigos!

Never again male teachers and female teachers treated as enemies!

8.7. Si no hay un mango partido al medio, bueno, lo que haiga para el que más necesite.

If there isn't a dollar split in half, well, whatever there may be for the one who needs it most.

8.8. Buenos Aires es la provincia más grande de Argentina, si no contamos la Antártida.

Buenos Aires is the largest province in Argentina, if we don't count the Antarctic.

8.9. Esa empresa de celulares, Google, del software de los celulares.

That cellphone company, Google, from the cellphone software.

8.10. Aquellos que fallecen por el coronavirus lo hacen antes de lo que les iba a tocar por la estadística.

Those who die from the coronavirus do so earlier than what would have been their statistical turn.

In (8.6), the governor invents the word *docentas*, with an explicit but nonexistent feminine gender marker. This reflects an overextension of inclusive language strategies, which aim to eliminate sexist linguistic patterns but are not applied through ad hoc coinages.

In (8.7), the morphological error (*haiga* instead of normative *haya*) does not compromise intelligibility but signals a casual stance toward formal linguistic norms, potentially affecting perceptions of authority and credibility.

Example (8.8) reveals a conceptual misunderstanding of geography and administrative classification. Although one might argue, at least technically, that part of Antarctica is claimed by Argentina as a province, it is an immense yet sparsely populated territory that cannot be compared to the demographic and territorial complexity of Buenos Aires Province,

which is not only by far the most populated but also the largest in surface area, exceeding even the size of Italy as a whole.

Utterance (8.9) exemplifies a categorical misclassification: Google is a software and services company, not a mobile phone manufacturer. Such conflation, though seemingly minor, exposes superficial understandings of technological and corporate structures that may shape public perception.

Finally, (8.10) demonstrates a fundamental error in probabilistic reasoning. By framing mortality as an individual deviation from a deterministic statistical timeline, the governor conflates probabilistic aggregates with singular outcomes, illustrating a common cognitive bias in public discussions of risk.

Taken together, these examples show how marginal linguistic and conceptual slips in political discourse offer a window into the cognitive schemas and rhetorical practices of political actors. They highlight how political language simultaneously constructs social reality, signals inclusivity or authority, and reproduces misunderstandings that resonate with broader patterns of public cognition.

The juxtaposition of Bush's *Bushisms* and Kicillof's *kiciladas* illustrates that such deviations, while often striking or humorous, do not amount to genuine creativity in a structural sense. And perhaps more importantly, it helps us to begin to recognize the "fine line between creative and wrong" (Uhrig, 2020).

Unlike poetry, deliberate wordplay, or crafted jokes, these slips are not the product of intentional design but of cognitive overload, conceptual misclassification, or rhetorical improvisation. Their novelty emerges primarily through audience interpretation rather than through an active poetic function.

This distinction is crucial: poetic creativity deliberately mobilizes language to suspend oppositions, generate paradoxes, or open imaginative possibilities, whereas political slips merely expose the limits of spontaneous cognition under pressure. In this sense, errors in political

discourse may mimic the surface features of creative language (unexpected combinations, novel expressions, or paradoxical statements) yet they lack the purposeful aesthetic or rhetorical construction that defines poetic invention. Nonetheless, their marginal and involuntary character makes them valuable for analysis, as they illuminate how meaning is negotiated in real time and how public figures reveal, often inadvertently, the cognitive and ideological underpinnings of their discourse.

4. Conclusions: The linguistic network as the condition of possibility and limitation

The analytical journey through ostensibly “marginal cases”—misunderstandings, slips, errors, and creative linguistic acts—has enabled a robust support of the central tenet of the Relational Perspective: language operates as a dynamic, interactive network in which meaning emerges not merely from pre-existing linguistic structures but from the real-time activation and interaction of conceptual, lexico-grammatical, and phonological nodes. These deviations are far from random; they reveal the structured nature of language, shaped by phonological proximity, lexical salience, and idiosyncratic stylistic tendencies. The cases analyzed show that linguistic phenomena, even when appearing anomalous, conform to underlying patterns that illuminate the operational logic of communication.

From this perspective, language is less a conduit for transmitting fixed meanings than a system for generating and activating networks of potential meanings. The first key insight drawn from the analysis is that meaning functions primarily as activation rather than transmission. Texts, whether an attorney’s statement, a political discourse, or a poetic verse, do not carry meaning in themselves; rather, their elements activate specific networks of knowledge and associations within the interpreter’s mind. Interpretation is therefore inherently active: the interpreter recognizes structural patterns, forms new connections, and identifies salient relations between elements. Comprehension relies crucially on linking incoming

linguistic stimuli with pre-existing cognitive structures and relational networks, making prior knowledge indispensable to understanding.

The relational account also clarifies the conceptual boundary between creativity and error, allowing a precise distinction of specific instances. Poetic creativity and conceptual error, while both producing deviations from conventional or unmarked structures, operate along distinct axes with different implications for meaning and truth. Creativity is a dimension of language that operates within the poetic function: it transforms the form of an expression to evoke additional or enriched meanings without compromising its referential function. Consider the Mapudungun line created by Aiken, which exemplifies this principle:

7. Iñchiñ Mapu Küme Ülkantun Müley Ñi Wenu Mapu

The song of our good earth is in its land above/sky

The term *wenu mapu* (“above land,” i.e., sky) contrasts with *mapu* (“earth/land”). Here, the poetic function—mediated by the node *ülkantun* (song/poetry)—suspends the apparent antonymy between earth and sky, enabling a conceptual interpenetration that the Spanish translation captures as *En este suelo habitan las estrellas* (*In this soil dwell the stars*). This shows that poetry manipulates the potential of meaning, exploiting polysemy and inhibiting conventional conceptual constraints.

Importantly, this creative act is inherently relational: it involves both the speaker or writer, and the interpreter, whose engagement completes the process of sense-making. The interpreter’s contribution is not passive; it is constitutive of the final meaning. The poem’s significance emerges in the interpretive act, producing a cosmological integration that operates independently of truth or falsity. In this framework, the poem is not evaluated in terms of correctness; it is meaningful, and its value lies in its capacity to generate a new relational configuration of concepts.

By contrast, an error is defined as a failure of the referential function. A conceptual error is something that is wrong precisely because it disrupts

the correspondence between linguistic expression and the state of affairs it intends to describe, thereby compromising propositional truth. The example of Governor Kicillof's confusion between the homophones *barones* (political leaders) and *varones* (males) illustrates this point:

3. Hay una especie de cultura del machismo que parte de cosas tan básicas como llamar a los intendentes *varones* del Conurbano. There is a kind of culture of machismo that stems from things as basic as calling the mayors *males* of the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area.

In Aristotelian terms: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false." Kicillof's correct referent should have been the specialized political category of *barones*, denoting figures of authority and paternalistic power. Instead, he activated *varones*, a generic gender category, thereby altering the truth value of the underlying political and cultural assumption. This substitution transforms a critique of political structures into an inaccurate commentary on gender, illustrating a breakdown of the referential network.

In this type of error, any perceived creativity is accidental, post-hoc, and interpretive: humor or satire emerges not from the speaker's intent but from the interpreter's recognition of incongruity. The speaker's objective was referential accuracy; failure occurs when the utterance fails to correspond to the intended state of affairs. Unlike poetic creation, error operates squarely along the axis of propositional truth, highlighting the fragility of referential systems under cognitive or linguistic pressure.

Taken together, these "marginal cases" illuminate the dual nature of linguistic networks. Errors reveal the limitations and vulnerabilities of the referential function, demonstrating how easily truth can be compromised when activation patterns misalign. Creativity, on the other hand, exemplifies the resilience and generative potential of language, showing how the same network can be leveraged to construct new layers of meaning, enrich interpretation, and enable complex cognitive and aesthetic experiences. The relational perspective thus offers a unifying

framework: it situates both error and creativity within a coherent network model, illustrating how meaning arises dynamically, contingent on the interplay between nodes, cognitive structures, and interpretive engagement.

Ultimately, this analysis highlights the essential role of networks in linguistic functioning: they are simultaneously the conditions of possibility and the constraints that shape language. The network allows language to be generative, flexible, and capable of producing complex aesthetic experiences, yet it also imposes structural boundaries that determine when an utterance succeeds or fails in conveying truth. By attending to both creative and erroneous cases, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how language operates as an intricate, relational system, one in which meaning is never static, truth depends on correct reference, and creativity manifests through the interpretive synthesis of sender and receiver.

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