# A Phonological Study of Mondegreens in English

**Israa B. Abdurrahman**
**Assistant Lecturers**
**Department of English**
**College of Education for Women**
**Tikrit University**

**Ruqaiya B. Abdurrahman**
**Assistant Lecturers**
**Department of English**
**College of Education for Women**
**Tikrit University**

## ABSTRACT

An accidental mishearing of a phrase sometimes makes the phrase acquire a new meaning. This mishearing is called 'mondegreen'. If utterances are composed, on purpose, to result in mondegreens, then their aim is to entertain the hearer and to create jokes and riddles, mainly. For example,

a. "He took **a nice** cold shower after his date" (original).

b. "He took **an ice** cold shower after his date" (mondegreen).

If not, then those mondegreens are accidental and can be applied to any type of speech especially songs and lyrics where the phonological environment sounds ambiguous. For example,

a. "Excuse me while I kiss **the sky**" (original).

b. "Excuse me while I kiss **this guy**" (mondegreen).

The task of this paper is trying to answer the question why we mondegreen. To achieve that, some linguistic theories are applied to explain the act of mondegreening, then a phonological analysis is applied to a group of eight chosen texts. This paper handles, also, the definition of mondegreens, how it came into existence, and types of mondegreens. Finally, findings and conclusions will be listed at the end of the analysis.

## 1. Introduction

One can hear what others say to him; this is what is called speech perception, and the basic of it for spoken language is the recognition of speech entities-sounds (Radford, et.al,2009:109).

An accidental mishearing of a phrase sometimes makes the phrase acquire a new meaning. This sort of mishearing can be called as a sort of aural malapropism[1], i.e., instead of saying the wrong word, you hear the wrong one. The whole process of mishearing is called a mondegreen. Mondegreens can technically be applied to any speech which is regarded as a fertile field for sowing such phenomenon.

In this case, the original phrase and the misheard (mondegreen) are regarded as oronyms[2] or partial oronyms[3] for example:

a. "The Cross **I'd bear**" (original).
b. "The cross-**eyed bear**" (mondegreen)
(Yule, 2006: 141).

a. "The **stuffy nose** can lead to problems" (original).
b. "The **stuff he knows** can lead to problems" (mondegreen)
(Bird,1998:11).

## 2. Defining Mondegreens

A mondegreen (sometimes spelled as "mondagreen") is the mishearing of a phrase which results in getting a new different meaning (Wikipedia, 2009: 1-6).

The word "mondegreen" is itself a mondegreen. This term was coined by the American writer Sylvia Wright in an essay which is entitled "The Death of Lady mondegreen":

Ye highlands and ye lowlands,
Oh, where hae ye been?
They have slain the Earl of Murray,
And **laid him on the green**.

In that essay she explained that she was amazed to discover for many years that she had misunderstood the last line of the first stanza in the Scottish ballad "The Bonney of Earl Murray". She understands the last line as:

And **Lady Mondegreen.**

After the disappearance of Silvia's tragic heroine, Lady Mondegreen, this term came to be used widely for describing such mishearings or misinterpretation that are resulted from ear slips in lyrics and other fields of speech (Ledrer, 2000: 78).

Though Silvia Wright was a child when she first caught this mistaken recognition (which might be resulted from the fact that children have their own limited vocabularies), even adult listeners can be exposed to mishearing of some sounds even if they are spoken correctly. For instance:

a. Hormone treatment should be available for **postmenopausal** woman (original).

b. Hormone treatment should be available for **postmen or pausal** woman (mondegreern) (Bloomer and Wray, 2006:20).

## 2.1 Intentional Mondegreens (Oronyms)

Those are strings of words or phrases that sound the same as other strings of words or phrases, but they are spelled differently and hold different meanings, as a result (Erard, 2008: 278). In that, oronyms can be listed under the name 'homophonic phrases' since they have almost similar homophones.

Those oronyms 'homophonic phrases' are classified by the researchers as 'intentional mondegreens' as opposed to 'unintentional mondegreens' because they ,most of the times, are selected by the speaker intentionally. They are chosen to create phonological humors like jokes (Crystal, 2004: 406), or may be to irritate and confuse the listener(on purpose).

The main trigger for such mondegreens, as it seems shared with the following corpus of examples, is the difficulty of how to judge the where one word ends and the next begins (i. e., word and syllable boundaries, phonologically speaking).

a. The good **can decay many** ways (original).
b. The good **candy came any** ways (mondegreen).

a. Be careful how you choose **a name** for your baby (original).
b. Be careful how you choose **an aim** for your baby (mondegreen).

a. The parcel was secured by a **grey tape** (original).
b. The parcel was secured by a **great ape** (mondegreen).

a. He greedily tucked into the juicy **plum pie** (original).
b. He greedily tucked into the juicy **plump eye** (mondegreen).

a. If you listen you can hear the **night rain** (original).
b. If you listen you can hear the **night train** (mondegreen).

a. Urgent **peace talks** were needed to advert the war (original).
b. Urgent **pea stalks** were needed to advert the war (mondegreen)

a. I don't know how **mature** people enjoy such sights (original).
b. I don't know how **much your** people enjoy such sights (mondegreen).

a. The **stuffy nose** can lead to problems (original).

b. The **stuff he knows** can lead to problems(mondegreen)(Bird,1998:11).

Many jokes are based on mondegreens to create funny situations. However, if these mondegreens are unintentionally created, they will mostly result in breaking conversations down. Notice the following situation:

> "Three guys are out walking. First one says, "**Windy**, isn't it?"
>
> Second one says, "No it is **Thursday**!"
>
> Third one says, "So am I. Let's go get at a bear." (Kosur, 2010:4)

The first mondegreen is with 'windy'. It is misheard as 'Wednesday'. The second mondegreen is with 'Thursday' which misheard as 'thirsty'!

## 2.2 Unintentional Mondegreens

As it is mentioned before, a mondegreen is in general a mishearing of a phrase, or in particular of a song lyric in a way that it acquires a new meaning.

Unintentional mondegreens are most of the times the results of mishearing songs, lyrics, and ballads, or any ambiguous utterances (Erard, 2008: 36).These mondegreens are considered as unintentional because the singer or the ballad composer does not aim at eluding or irritating the listener; rather s/he aims at amusing or moving the listener by these artistic genres.

These unintentional mondegreens can be classified under the topic "partial oronyms' since they are not completely homophonic phrases like oronyms. Besides, the phonological triggers for leading to such mondegreens are rather different from those of oronyms: different stress placement, phonological ambiguity, and ambisyllabicity.

In listening to lyrics or songs the matter differs greatly from listening to ordinary speech. Singers use always a rather different modified type of pronunciation, which makes the lyric/song more difficult to be understood. Sometimes singers lengthen short vowels and vice versa; stressed syllables may be unstressed and vice versa (Crystal, 2004: 275).

Below are some examples of unintentional mondegreens , the majority of which are taken from English songs and lyrics:

a-"Gladly the **Cross I'd** bear" (original)
b-"Gladly the **cross-eyed** bear" (mishearing) (Yule, 2006: 141).

a-"Excuse me while I kiss **the sky**" (original)
b-"Excuse me while I kiss **this guy**" (mondegreen)(Akmajian, etal,2001: 424).

a-"Life would be ecstasy, you and me **endlessly**" (original)
b-"Life would be ecstasy, you and me **and Leslie**" (mondegreen).

a-"You're the devil in **disguise**, oh yes you are" (original)
b-"You're the devil in **the sky**, oh yes you are" (mondegreen)
(Radford, etal, 2009).
a-"and **laid him on the green**" (original)
b-"and **lady him mondegreen**" (mondegreen)

a-"There's a **bad moon** on the **rise**" (original)
b-"There's a **bathroom on the right**" (mondegreen)(Ledrer, 2000:78).

a-"A girl with **kaleidoscope eyes**" (original)

b-"A girl with **colitis goes by**" (mondegreen)( Akmajian, etal, 2001: 424).

a-"There's one thing that turns this **grey sky** to blue" (original)
b-"There's one thing that turns this **car race** to blue" (mishearing).

a-"Play that **funky** music white boy" (original)
b-"Play that **fucking** music right boy" (mondegreen)(Erard, 2008:279).

## 3. The Syllable and its Structure

A syllable a is simply a unit of sound that consists of at least one phoneme but it is smaller than a word (Crystal, 2007: 71). The syllable has a great role in speech. All words can be divided into one or more syllables (Crystal,2004:246). The most important permanent part of the syllable is the nucleus which is always a vowel. It can be preceded by three optional consonants, and followed by other optional four. (The brackets below indicate optionality)

(c)(c)(c) v (c)(c)(c)(c) (Roach, 2000: 71)
are /a:/ (v)
lie /laɪ/ (cv)
aim /eɪm/ (vc)
lies /laɪs/ (cvc)
play /pleɪ/ (ccv)
quick /kwɪk/ (ccvc)
kwilt /kwɪlt/ (cvcc)
twelfths /twelfϴs/ (ccvcccc)

Radford, etal (2009: 79-80) believe that there are certain consonant sequences constitute 'bad syllables' like the following clusters[4]:

*/nepl/
*/lupm/
*/hard/
*/lpeɪ/
*/rpel/
*/wkɪk/
*/jku:/ (the asterisk indicates a wrong consonant sequence)

So, there are certain restrictions that rule our choice of consonant sequences. These rules are called 'phonotactic rules' or 'phonotactics' (Radford, etal, 2009 :80) and (Akmajian, etal, 2001 :126). The consonant or consonant cluster that precedes the nucleus is called the 'onset', while the consonant or consonant cluster that follows the nucleus is called the 'coda' (Roach, 2000, 71).

### 3.1 The Maximal Onset Principle

In syllabification, i.e., syllable division, many problems can arise especially when the hearer is dealing with polysyllabic words trying to determine syllable boundaries.

The maximum onset principle is one of the most acceptable solutions for dividing problematic words such as /ekstra/. This principle states that when you are dividing two syllables, any consonant between them should be attached to the right rather than to the left (Roach, 2000: 78).

Hence, we can syllabify /ekstra/ as (ek.stra) rather than (e.kstra), (eks.tra), (ekst.ra), (ekstr.a).

### 3.2 Ambisyllabisity

There are certain syllables that are considered to be somehow problematic , because they do not match with the maximal onset

principle. The main cause of this difficulty is that they contain a consonant that, according to our phonotactic rules, belongs neither to coda (left) nor to the onset (right). The other difficulty is that the nucleus of the first syllable is a short vowel except /ə/ and these vowels should not be left open, with zero coda. (Roach, 2000: 78). For example, the word better is problematic since it can be syllabified as: (bet.ə) and (be.tə)

The maximum onset principle agrees with the second division, while the rule that refuses open nucleus accepts the first syllabification!

To satisfy the two phonotactic rules, the only solution is that the consonant /t/ belongs to both syllables. This consonant is named by phonologists as 'ambisyllabic'. Crystal (1992 :17) defines an ambisyllabic consonant as the consonant that functions as a member of both adjacent (neighbouring) syllables. Ambisyllabic consonants are described elsewhere by Crystal (1992: 182) as intervocalic consonants. They lie in between two vowels, and they behave elusively belonging to the left once and to the right once another. These intervocalic consonants (ambisyllabic), in this environment, acquire other features somehow different if they are used in other environments, especially with voicing features.

These tendencies like the maximum onset principle, open syllable, and ambisyllabicity sometimes cause problems in deciding syllable boundary. This leads, in turn, to failure in the recognition of word boundaries.

### 3.3 The Phonological Environment

As it is stated previously, that singers has modified a type of pronunciation their own which fits with the tunes of their lyrics.

This will lead to mishearing of certain vowels and mistaken stress placements. This is a clear trigger of mishearing of lyrics and songs.

Aspects of connected speech, like assimilation[5], flapping[6], weak forms[7] are considered as another trigger of mishearing resulting from the new phonological environment of quick connected speech. They mislead the hearer to committing mondegreens.

## 4. The Cohort Model

A great deal of research has been achieved on the perception of single sounds, syllables, or words (Crystal, 2007: 47). Speech perception is defined by Stork and Hartman(1976 :216) as the understanding of speech sounds, syllables , and words by a human listener. While recognition is the "unambiguous identification of linguistic elements such as syllables or words".

The cohort model, which is one of the models that deal with speech comprehension(conception and recognition), answers questions such as: "How do we work out so quickly what a word is- often after the first two phonemes"(O'Grady, etal, 1996: 450). This model states that:

As soon as we hear a word begin, we flag up all the words we know which have that sound at the beginning, creating a **word-initial cohort**. We then qualify those that no longer fit when the next sound is heard or which are unlikely because of the context (Bloomer and Wray, 2006: 19).

> Handling this text in other words, we can say that, the hearer analyzes words from their beginning to end. Thus, when we hear the word 'blue', for example, we consider firstly al the words that begin with the sound /b/. When the second sound /l/ is recognized, the hearer will eliminate many sounds and reduce the number of possible words (to cohort) to a limited number of words that begin with /bl-/. This will continue until the final

result of the cohort words will be one (O'Grady, etal, 1996 450). Sometimes the hearer's judgment depends totally on the first phonemes or the first syllable of that word (ibid).

This shows the great importance of the phoneme and the syllable in particular, i.e., it shows the importance of words' onsets and words' initial syllables to judge and choose the most appropriate word and word boundary.

This model explains why the hearer commits mondegreens such as:

a- Hormone treatment should be available for postmenopausal women (original).

b- Hormone treatment should be available for postmen or pausal women (mondegreen) (Bloomer and Wray, 2006:20).

## 5. Analysing Mondegreens Phonologically

Up to this point, it is clear that mondegreens are mishearing of speech utterances and song lyrics that carry a sort of ambiguity. They can be intentional or unintentional according to their purposes. In this section, a phonological study is carried out seeking to find what makes these utterances or lyrics being mondegreened.

The first step in the analysis of each text is to transcribe the original and the mondegreened texts depending on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)[8]. The aim after this transcription is to check out any phonological similarity between them. In this field, the aspects of connected speech like assimilation will be checked and determined whether can be the actual triggers for mondegreens.

The second step is to find out the possible word boundaries concerning the compared texts.

The third step is to look at the maximal onset principle to examine the differences in the alignment of syllable boundaries. This will give us an insight into the possible differences between the

alignment of syllable-boundaries. It will also give us an insight to the possible coincidences between syllable- and word- boundaries.

## 5.1 TEXT (1)

a. "Excuse me while I kiss **the sky**" (original).
b. "Excuse me while I kiss **this guy**" (mondegreen)
(Akmajian, etal,2001: 424).
Transcription: a. /ðə. skaɪ/
b. /ðɪs. gaɪ/

As it can be seen, there are two differences between the two texts: In the original, the central vowel /ə/ is used, while in the mondgreen, it is mistaken for the unrounded front close vowel /ɪ/. In the original, the voiceless velar stop is used, while in the mondegreen, it is mistaken for the voiced velar stop /g/. Word and syllable numbers are equal: two for both. Yet, syllable- and word-boundaries are not assigned equally, as it will explained below. Since the voiceless velar stop /k/ in "the sky" is unaspirated*, it makes it sound much like the unaspirated voiced velar stop /g/. It is, therefore, much easier to mistakenly hear "this guy" instead of "the sky". This is the first trigger for this mondegreen.

The second trigger is that, the placement of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is different in the two texts. In the original, the /s/ is found in the onset of the second syllable /skaɪ/, while, in the mondegreen, it is found in the coda of the first syllable /ðɪs/. This means that the listener has mistakenly placed the syllable boundary after /s/ which results in a new word.

This is legitimate because the phoneme /s/ has the feature of ambisyllabicity in this situation. It can be the coda of the first syllable and the onset of the next without violating any constrains.

Hence, the triggers for this mondegreen is, firstly, the additional phonological feature of /k/ in being unaspirated. Secondly, the ambisyllabic /s/ leads the hearer to misplace syllable- and word- boundary.

## 5.2 TEXT (2)

a. "Life would be ecstasy, you and me **endlessly**" (original).
b. "Life would be ecstasy, you and me **and Lesslie**" (mondegreen) (Radford, etal, 2009).
Transcription: a. /endleslɪ/
b. /ənd leslɪ/

According to the transcription, it can be seen that there is only one difference between the two texts. In the original, the unrounded front close-mid vowel /e/ is used, while in the mondegreen, it is mistaken for the central open-mid vowel /ə/. The height of the tongue is approximately similar for the two vowels. They are likely to be misheard. Having a look at the phonological environment, it can be seen that the syllable 'end' is stressed which makes the vowel /e/ much look like /ə/.

The two utterances (original & mondegreen) consist of the same number of syllables: three. [end. les. lɪ] &[ənd. les. lɪ] consequently. Nevertheless, the number of words is different. The original includes only one word "endlessly", while the mondegreen has two words "and Lesslie". It is obvious that the listener mistakenly believes that there is a word boundary to the left of "Lesslie" though it is only a syllable boundary. This will result, mistakenly, in a new word.
We can decide ,then, that the main trigger for this mondegreem is the coincidence of syllable- and word- boundaries.

**5.3 TEXT (3)**

a. "You are the devil in **disguise**" (original).
b. "You are the devil in **the skies**" (mondegreen)
(Radford, etal, 2009).
Transcription: /dɪsgaɪz/ (original).
/ðə skaɪz/ (mondegreen).

It can be seen that there are three differences between the two texts. In the original, the voiced alveolar stop is used, while in the mondegreen, it is mistaken for the voiced dental fricative /ð/. Although that they do not seem to be phonetically similar, however, they are prone to progressive assimilation which adds certain features to the sound /ð/:

"in the" /ɪn ðə/→/ɪn̪ n̪ə/

Hence, assimilation has changed the place of articulation of /ð/ from alveolar to dental. Yet, this sound /n̪/ with additional distinctive features seems to coincide much with /d/ of the original. This will give a chance to be misheard.

In the original, the unrounded front close vowel /ɪ/ is used, while in the mondegreen, it is mistaken for the central vowel /ə/. The only excuse for this interchange is the application of the cohort model taking into consideration that the first two phonemes are heard as /ðə/. Hence the word skies is best fit in this situation.

In the original, the voiced velar stop /g/ is used, while in the mondegreen, it mistaken for the voiceless velar stop /k/. They both have the same place and manner of articulation, beside that the sound /k/ has lost its aspiration because of the effect of the neighboring /s/. All these factors make the two sounds likely to be misheard.

If we put in consideration the tendency for the maximal onset principle, we can see that there is a difference in the placement of

the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. In the original, it is put in the coda of the first syllable /dɪs/, while in the mondegreen, it is put in the onset of the second syllable /skaɪz/. As the maximal onset principle states that one should tend to maximize the onset rather than the coda, the listener, mistakenly, places the sound /s/ in the onset / skaɪz/ rather than the coda /ðə/.

This tendency leads to creating a syllable boundary in the mondegreen [ðɪs. gaɪ]. This mistaken syllable boundary creates a false word boundary and coincides with it. Still one more point to be mentioned here: what encourages the hearer capturing this mondegreen is 'stress placement', as it is shown below:

a. [YOU'RE the DEvil in disGUISE] (original).
b. [YOU'RE the DEvil in the SKIES] (mondegreen).

According to stress rule, there should be a syllable boundary before a stressed syllable. That's why the listener, mistakenly, believes in a word boundary to the left of the stressed syllable [GUISE] though it is only a syllable boundary.

Hence, the trigger for this mondegreen is the false syllabification which results from the ambiguous phonological environment and stress placement.

**5.4 TEXT (4)**

a. "Gladly, the Cross I'd bear" (original).
b. "Gladly, the cross-eyed bear" (mondegreen)
(Yule,2006: 141).
Transcription: /kros aɪd/ (original).
/ kros aɪd/ (mondegreen).

As it can be seen, the phonetic transcriptions are exactly the same. They are impossible to distinguish. The original has three

words, while the mondegreen has two. Concerning the number of syllables, the two texts have the same number: two (due to the contraction of 'I would' into 'I'd'). Syllable boundaries are hence assigned equally. The only difference is in number of words. This difference is completely not clear to the listener, therefore, the two constructions are highly interchangeable. It seems that phonological ambiguity, that results from the failure of word boundary recognition, is the only trigger for this mondegreen.

### 5.5 Text (5)

a. "and laid him on the green" (original).

b. "and Lady Mondegreen" (mondegreen)

(Ledrer, 2000:78).

Transcription: a. /leɪd ɪm on ðə griːn/

b. /leɪdɪ mondəgriːn/

As can be seen, there is only one difference in transcription: in the original, the voiced dental fricative /ð/ is used, while in the mondegreen it is mistaken for the voiced alveolar stop /d/.

The glottal stop /h/ is being neglected here since in connected speech the majority of pronouns takes the weak form. The weak form of 'him' is /ɪm/ rather than /hɪm/.

Concerning syllable boundaries,

a.[leɪd. ɪm. on. ðə. griːn/

b./leɪ. dɪ. mon. də. griːn/

they are equal in number:5. But according to the maximal onset principle, the listener tends to maximize the onset of the syllable /dɪ/ regarding /d/ as the onset of /dɪ/ rather than the coda of /leɪd/. The listener also maximizes, mistakenly, the onset of the mondegreened syllable /mon/ regarding /m/ as the onset of this syllable rather than

the coda of the previous syllable /ɪm/. Actually, the listener here is the prey of maximal onset principle which misleads him.

As a result of this syllabification, the number of words is (five), while in the mondegreen the number is (two) only. This is because the listener has put a syllable boundary in between /leɪd/. This results in the mistaken "Lady" instead of "laid him". This results in not recognizing the word-boundaries between "him", "on", the" and "green".

Concerning stress placement:

a. [and LAID him on the GREEN]
b. [and Lady MONdeGREEN]

Stress rules assume that there is a word boundary to the left of "him on" because it is an unstressed syllable in the original[9]. The cause is different in the mondegreen which aligned the boundary before the weak syllable /dɪ/. Here, the boundary is treated by the hearer as a syllable not as a word-boundary.

Hence, the triggers for this mondegreen are mistaken syllabification and stress placement which create, in turn, a coincidence between syllable and word-boundary.

## 5.6 Text (6)

a."Urgent **peace talks** were needed to avert a war" (original).
b."Urgent **pea stalks** were needed to avert a war" (mondegreened) (Bird,1998:11).
Transcription: a. /pi:s to:ks/
b. /pi: sto:ks/

In this example, no noticeable differences between transcription are found. The two transcriptions are exactly the same. Consequently, the original utterance and the mondegreen are difficult to distinguish.

The number of words in concern is two for both original and mondegreen. The number of syllables is again equally two for both.

Because of the listener's tendency for the maximal onset principle, the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is mistakenly placed as the onset of the next word rather than the coda of the previous one. This will create a false placement of word- and syllable- boundary.

Still there are two differences between the two utterances. Firstly, in the original utterance, the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ is aspirated since it occupies the initial place in the onset of the second syllable /to:ks/. Consequently, the following long rounded vowel /o:/ is devoiced. In the mondegreen the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ of /sto:ks/ is unaspirated because of the effect of the preceding /s/.

Secondly, the long high mid-close vowel /i:/ is shorter in /pi:s/ because it is followed by a strong voiceless consonant /s/. while the long unrounded high mid-close vowel in the mondegreened utterance is longer in /pi:/ since it is not followed by coda.

Hence, it seems that the actual trigger for this mondegreen is the mistaken syllabification.

## 5.7 Text (7)

a. The **stuffy nose** can lead to problems (original).

b. The **stuff he knows** can lead to problems(mondegreen)

(Bird,1998:11).

Transcription: a. /stʌfɪ nəuz/

b./ stʌf ɪ nəuz/

From the transcribtion of the two texts, it can be seen that there is only one difference. The number of words is two in the original and three in the mondegreen. However, the number of syllables is equally similar: three.

It is obvious here that the trigger for this mondegreeen is the second unstressed syllable [stʌf. ɪ] or [stʌ. fɪ]. according to the maximum onset syllable, [stʌ.fi] is the most acceptable syllable division. On the other hand, ambisyllabicity states that /f/ can be a coda for /stʌf/ or an onset for /fi/. Or maybe it is a minimum syllable[10] /ɪ/ that has a zero onset and a zero coda, too.

The other trigger is that the pronoun 'he' is pronounced as /hi:/. But in connected speech, this pronoun takes its weak form /ɪ/ and usually pronounced without /h/ (except at the beginning of the sentence).

This similarity between this weak syllable 'he' in the mondegreen and the unstressed syllable in /stʌfɪ/ misguides the listener and causes to create a syllable boundary that leads to create a new mistaken word boundary.

### 5.8 Text (8)

a. "Will your pet **catch it** before he comes back in?" (original).
b. "will your pet **cat shit** before he comes back in?" (mondegreen)

(Bird,1998:11).

Transcription: a. /kætʃ ɪt/
b. /kæt ʃɪt/

The transcription of the two texts shows that there are two differences between them. The phrases in concern have equally the same number of words and syllables: two for both. The differences lie in that the first syllable of the original ends with the voiceless, palato-alveolar stop /tʃ/ and the second syllable has a zero onset. While in the mondegreen, the coda of the first syllable is but the

voiceless alveolar stop /t/. The onset of the second syllable is the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. This leads to create a false syllable and word boundary.

The trigger for this mondegreen is that, in connected speech, the coda of the first syllable and the onset of the next are prone to assimilation: t+ʃ→/tʃ/. The result is the same sound in the coda of the original; i.e, /tʃ/.

Hence, the trigger of this mondegreen is the phonological process "assimilation", i.e, phonological environment.

## 6. Findings of the Analysis

The analysis of the texts above has arrived at the following findings:

1. For every mondegreen there is one or more triggers sometimes differ from one mondegreen to another.
2. Syllable boundaries are very important in deciding word boundaries and the meaning of the utterance as a result.
3. The main triggers for mondegreens are as follows:
   a. phonological ambiguity
   b. ambicillabicity
   c. the tendency for the maximal onset principle
   d. the coincidence between syllable/ word boundary
   e. mistaken stress placement
   f. aspects of connected speech, like assimilation
   g. weak forms
   h. mistaken syllabification
4. If the difference between the original and the mondegreen, in transcription, is vowels; then the two vowels have something in share. They are similar in the part of the tongue being raised, or most of the times, height of the tongue.

5. If the difference between the original and the mondegreen, in transcription, is consonants, then they should have something in share. They share the same manner of articulation and/or ,mostly, place of articulation.

## 7. Conclusions

This study has concluded many points. The most outstanding of which are as follows:

1. Mondegreens are misheard utterances or lyrics. Those misheard utterances and the original are being oronyms, i.e, they are considered as homophonic or semi-homophonic phrases.
2. Speech perception is concerned with words and other larger pieces of utterances; while recognition is concerned with the identification of syllables and phonemes.
3. Not only children, but also adults are prone to mishearing.
4. International mondegreens are those oronyms that are composed internationally (for certain purposes) to elude the listener for the sake of entertainment and comical effect like jokes.
5. Unintentional mondegreens are those resulted from ambiguous lyrics or utterances.
6. The syllable has a great role in speech, especially in disambiguating certain utterances.
7. Concerning syllables, phonotactic constrains are those rules that are put to help us in recognizing and deciding syllable boundaries.
8. Incorrect identification of syllable boundaries leads us sometimes to mishearing which results in confusing the listener.
9. The maximal onset principle is a phonotactic constrain which states that the consonants between two vowels should be placed to the right rather than the left, i,e, to the onset rather than to the coda.

10. Ambisyllabicity is the phonological situation in which an intervocalic consonant can belong elusively once to the onset, another to the coda.
11. Mondegreens sometimes result in breaking conversation down.

**NOTES**

1. Aural malapropism is the inadvertent substitution of one word for another because they sound alike (Erard, 2008: 278).
2. Oronyms are those homophonic phrases. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between them.
3. Partial oronyms are those semi-homophonic phrases. There are noticeable differences between them.
4. A cluster is a sequence of two consonants or more without a vowel between them.
5. Assimilation is the phonological process by which two consonants affect each other so that they result in a new sound.
6. Flapping is the process in which a dental or alveolar stop changes to flap/r/ articulation.
7. Weak forms are those unstressed forms of functional words.
8. IPA It is the abbreviation of the International Phonetic Alphabet which includes all sound symbols that are acceptable all over the world.
9. See Roach (2000, 93).
10. A minimum syllable is the syllable that contains no onset and no coda, like or /o:/.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akmajian, A., Demers, R.A., Farmer, A, K., Harnish, R. (2001) Linguistics- An Introduction to Language and Communication. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bird, H. (1998) Slips of the Ear as Evidence for the Postperceptual Priority of communication. Walter de Gruyter Ltd.

Bloomer, A., Wray, A. (2006) Projects in Linguistics-A Practical Guide to Research. Hodder Arnold, GB.

Crystal, D. (1992) A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Basil Blackwell Publishers.

…… (2004) The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

…… (2007) How Language Works. Clays Ltd, St lves plc.

Erard, M. (2008) Um Slips, Stumbles, and Verbal Blunders, and What They Mean. Anchor Books Edition, USA.

Kosur, H, M. (2010) Fun with English Oronyms. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ledrer, R. (2000) "A Primer of Pun". In: English Journal, vol. 70, no. 6, p.32.

O'Grady, W., Dobrovolsky, M., Katamba, K. (1996) Contemporary Linguistics-An Introduction. Adison Wesley Longman Ltd.

Radford, A., Atkinson, M., Britain, D., Clashen, H., Spenser, A. (2009) Linguistics-An Introduction. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

Roach, P. (2000) English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wikipedia (2009) [Wikipedia.com].

Yule, G., (2006) The Study of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.