

USAGE OF INACCURATE WORDS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

Narzikulova Maftuna Salimovna,

*Teacher of SamSIFL Elise Brittan, PhD student at Culture,
Literacy, and Language at UTSA*

Abstract: Clear language is powerful language. Clarity is the first concern of a public speaker when it comes to choosing how to phrase the ideas of his or her speech. If you are not clear, specific, precise, detailed, and sensory with your language, you won't have to worry about being emotional or persuasive, because you won't be understood. Below are some common ways that speakers use incorrect and inaccurate words in speech.

Key words: inaccurate word usage, malapropism, eggcorn, losing credibility, careful word choice.

As with anything in life, there are positive and negative usage of language. One of the first concepts a speaker needs to think about when looking at language use is appropriateness. By appropriateness, we mean whether the language is suitable or fitting for ourselves as the speaker, our audience, the speaking context, and the speech itself. Words are the building blocks of language, and as such, it is important we use them correctly. Otherwise, expressions and messages we wish to convey to others won't be understood. As a person we learn words by experiencing them. Reading words without ever hearing them can often lead to mispronunciation. Furthermore, when we learn words by hearing them without ever reading or looking up the denotative or dictionary meaning, we sometimes mishear or conflate what we hear with what we already know, resulting in embarrassing inaccuracies when we later use that word. When speakers use incorrect words, it can, at the very least, confuse and distract the audience, and at worst, lower their credibility with the audience.

Words that do not exist.

This error occurs when we mishear or conflate two words to inadvertently create a new, nonexistent word rather than using the correct word for what we mean. Common examples are conversate and supposably. Words are means of communication, so it is vital to choose them in a careful way. The ideas can be complex and sophisticated, but the speech should express them simply. Clearly delivered messages also show respect and consideration for your audience, which helps to build better relationships.

Not knowing the definition of a word.

This error happens when we only learn a word by hearing it and rather than learning the actual definition or dictionary meaning, we mistake those common words for the actual word that means what we intend. Common examples are bemused,

compelled, ambivalent, and literal. It should be admitted that every word has a certain function or definition for communicative process. It is important that words are used according to those functions.

Malapropism.

Sometimes, we just say the wrong things. Other times, we purposely say the wrong things. In each case, the French phrase *mal à propo*, which means “out of place” or “unsuitable” happens. The term malapropism began appearing in English texts in the 19th century. A malapropism is the use of an incorrect word in place of a word with a similar sound, resulting in a nonsensical statement. For example, *The doctor administered the anecdote*. A doctor is meant to administer an “antidote,” or remedy, rather than an “anecdote,” or story. Or we can take another example: *I have good punctuation—I’m never late!* The malapropism here is “punctuation” for “punctuality.” This type of usage of the words can cause misunderstanding in communication.

Eggcorns.

An eggcorn is a word or phrase that results from a mishearing or misinterpretation of another because it sounds similar and seems logical or plausible. The term eggcorn—itsself an alteration of acorn—is a recent invention, coined by the linguist Geoffrey Pullum to describe the phenomenon. An example is the common eggcorn “all intents and purposes” which should be “all intents and purposes.” An eggcorn often involves replacing an unfamiliar, archaic, or obscure word with a more common or modern word and the speaker/writer is often unaware there has been an error.

Exaggeration

Speakers should also be careful about using exaggeration. Hyperbole is the use of moderate exaggeration for effect and is an acceptable and useful language strategy. What is not acceptable, however, is the use of exaggeration to an extent that you risk losing credibility. For example, while it is acceptable to note that “it snows in Africa as often as pigs fly,” it would not be acceptable to state that “It never snows in Africa.” In the first case, hyperbole is being used as a form of exaggeration meant to creatively communicate an idea. In the second case, the use of exaggeration is stating something that is not true. It is advisable to use words such as “never” and “always” when speaking. It may be the case that speakers make this mistake accidentally because they are not careful with regard to word choice. We so easily throw words like “always” and “never” around in everyday conversation that this tendency transfers onto our public speeches when we are not thinking carefully about word choice. As said by – Hosea Ballou “Exaggeration is a blood relation to falsehood and nearly as blamable.”

To sum up, an effective public speaker clearly expresses an idea in a way that keeps the audience interested by using correct word choice. A skilled public speaker can inspire people with selected words. The best public speakers possess an extensive vocabulary, good knowledge of grammar, correct pronunciation and varied sentence

length. Avoiding usage of above given terms, correct use and correct choice of words are considered as a key of successful speech.

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