

NATHANIEL AYERS' SCHIZOPHRENIA IN JOE WRIGHT'S THE SOLOIST: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstract

The study seeks to examine the linguistic phenomena of schizophrenia suffered by Nathaniel Ayers, the main character in Joe Wright's *The Soloist*. The research objectives are threefold, i.e. (1) to identify the verbal features of disorganized speeches, (2) to reveal the non-verbal features manifested through peculiar behaviours, and (3) to show to what extent the verbal and non-verbal features may take place simultaneously. Using qualitative method, data were in the form of utterances and behaviours produced by the schizophrenic, Nathaniel Ayers, in Joe Wright's *The Soloist*. The data sheet was the instrument of this research. Finally, to achieve research validity, investigator triangulation was applied. The results of this research are described as follows. First, six types of disorganized speeches are found in the movie, i.e. perseveration, illogicality, derailment, tangentiality, poverty of speech, and thought blocking. Second, five peculiar behaviours are revealed, i.e. aggression, shyness, excessive crying, meaningless hand motion, and meaningless laughter. Third, the schizophrenic undergoes three kinds of deviance in verbal and non-verbal features simultaneously. They are perseveration and aggression, illogicality and aggression, and perseveration and shyness. This indicates that the abnormal performances of the schizophrenic could be either in the form of utterances and/or behaviours as his problematic perceptions influence deviant productions.

Keywords: *schizophrenia, disorganized speeches, peculiar behaviours, Joe Wright's The Soloist.*

INTRODUCTION

Among other species in the universe, humans have been granted many aspects not only to live for themselves but also for their surroundings. The biggest reason which makes them a highly special creature is a blessing from God known as the mind. As the result of having mind, humans go through their activities in accordance to their reason. In other words, humans are affected by their mind when they are considering on how to perform their daily lives and they could either create something beneficial or destroy their life due to their decisions.

Strengthening the existence of mind, humans make rules for their own to be their norms as a control for their civilization.

Following that, humans have tried to increase their livelihood to be as well-arranged as possible for over generations. However, not every one of them agrees to uphold this view. Some are ignorant of the rules, especially for those whose brains experience some disorder due to some occurrences. Those who suffer from these disorders tend to ignore the societal norms which had been established by general opinion and uphold their own view on what constitutes as right and wrong. One of the disorders that shows what the researcher has explained is schizophrenia. A schizophrenic is defined as someone who is unable to comprehend reality due to their incapability to apply what common people perform. They tend to behave strangely and talk in an

awkward way since they are no longer bound by the society's rules and only focused on what they like as they only understand their own interests.

Every human has expectations and ambitions. However, ambition is not a trivial thing. When somebody tries their best to achieve something, it happens because the ambition pushes them. It is preceded by the existence of motivation which make someone wants to do anything they could to gain what they expect. Expectation, however, may not always be accomplished. In some cases, expectations just could not be achieved because of many aspects. Thus, people will come with various reactions over their failure. In a normal situation, some people think that failure is something common so that the person will not be worried for a long time. On the contrary, some people do not. In other words, when they are unable to overcome their failure in achieving their expectation, they will come with abnormal reaction as they have no good capability in controlling their mind to face the reality so that they become mentally ill and psychologically imbalanced. One of those mental illnesses is schizophrenia.

National Institute of Mental Health, U.S reports that the prevalence rate for schizophrenia is approximately 1% of the population in America (more than 2.5 million Americans). Moreover, World Health Organization reports that Schizophrenia ranks among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide. As the

population is growing in greater quantities time to time, people's awareness towards schizophrenia is also getting larger. This issue leads many directors to portray schizophrenics' lives in a movie. Several examples of the movies related to schizophrenia are *Some Voices (2000)*, *A Beautiful Mind (2001)*, *The Soloist (2009)*, and many more. All of those movies portray schizophrenia which is experienced by one of the characters in the movie. However, the one which attracts the researcher's attention is *The Soloist* by Joe Wright. This movie is based on a true story which tells about friendship between Steve Lopez and Nathaniel Anthony Ayers. Ayers is a former cello prodigy who suffers from schizophrenia. This disease lands him on the streets after two years of schooling at Juilliard. Meanwhile, Lopez is a journalist in Los Angeles Times who coincidentally meets Ayers in the street after hearing the beautiful sound of violin played by him. Lopez then tries to dig out what actually happens with Ayers as he is a talented person but ends up as a homeless man.

There are several approaches that can be used to analyze schizophrenia and one of them which fits is psycholinguistics. This study focuses on how human comprehend, acquire, and produce a language. It primarily concerned with the ways in which language is represented and processed in the brain. This is in line with schizophrenics who have to suffer from mind's disturbances which lead to language disorder. Thus, the abnormalities

performed by schizophrenics can be identified.

This research has three objectives, i.e. (1) to identify the verbal features of disorganized speeches, (2) to reveal the non-verbal features manifested through peculiar behaviours, and (3) to show to what extent the verbal and non-verbal features may take place simultaneously.

To identify the verbal features of disorganized speeches, this research uses a theory proposed by Liddle in *Thought and Language Index* (2000). He divides disorganized speeches into seven types. They are derailment, poverty of speech, tangentiality, illogicality, perseveration, neologism, and thought blocking. Meanwhile, to reveal the non-verbal features manifested through peculiar behaviours, this research utilizes a theory demonstrated by Bearden in *Prospective Cohort Study of Childhood Behavioural Deviance and Language Abnormalities as Predicators of Adult Schizophrenia* (2000). She classified deviant behaviours of schizophrenics into six types, i.e. thumb sucking, nail biting, meaningless hand motion, meaningless laughter, excessive crying, and also other deviant behaviours which cover aggression and shyness.

The research means to enrich the theory in psycholinguistics, especially that is concerned with language and mind and focused on schizophrenia. Furthermore, it is useful to gain or even deepen their knowledge in understanding the symptoms of

schizophrenia. Moreover, this study is expected to give more information about the subject of mental disorder, especially schizophrenia in relation to linguistics. Additionally, it is also intended to function as an additional reference of study which concerns with language and mind issues, especially schizophrenia.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used qualitative approach as the methodological orientation. The qualitative method was used in this research for it describes the phenomena of the use of language in the context by elucidating the data in the form of oral data from the subjects of the research being observed (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 39-48). The researcher described and illustrated the analysis in a vivid way to obtain interpretations. Then, the researcher demonstrated the phenomena occurred in his object in detailed words.

Furthermore, the form of the data was utterances and behaviours which were selected properly according to the need of the research. Hence, the context of the data was in the form of expressions related to schizophrenic categorizations. According to Lofland in Moleong (2004: 112), the main data of qualitative research are language and behavior. The main data of the study were collected from the movie script. These data were the utterances and behaviours of Nathaniel Ayers who experiences

schizophrenia in the movie entitled *The Soloist*.

Meanwhile, the data collection technique in this research was note taking which is a method to collect and record the data manually. Thus, there were some procedures conducted in collecting the data such as watching *The Soloist* comprehensively, rechecking whether the transcript corresponded to the movie, taking note on the utterances and behaviours of the character, then transferring the expressions as raw data into the data sheet as research instrument.

The instrument employed by the researcher was in the form of the data sheets. The data sheet represented Nathaniel Ayers' schizophrenic categories of deviant languages. In addition, the data sheet also helped the researcher to categorize disorganized speech and peculiar behaviour of Nathaniel Ayers' expression according to the movie to answer the first, the second and the third objectives. The data sheet was in the form of a table of types of disorganized speech and peculiar behavior of Nathaniel Ayers in *The Soloist*.

To examine qualitative data, the researcher employed textual analysis. Textual analysis is the data analysis techniques that were employed to conduct a qualitative research. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 210) state that textual analysis is described as identification or interpretation of a set of verbal or nonverbal communication.

Hence, to gain trustworthiness, the data must be checked based on these four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Moleong, 2004: 173). From these categories, the researcher used the criteria of credibility the most. To obtain the credible data, the researcher read and re-read comprehensively and critically the object and the result he had made. More particularly, the researcher also used the peer triangulation technique to gain more trustworthiness.

DISCUSSION

The phenomena of Nathaniel Ayers' disorganized speeches in Joe Wright's *The Soloist*

Extract (1) represents how Nathaniel performs perseveration in which he repeats words, phrases, and sentences in some occasion.

(1) **Nathaniel**: It really blows me away that someone as great as Beethoven was the leader of Los Angeles.

Steve : Yeah. I'm Steve Lopez, LA Times.

Nathaniel : Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z?

Steve : Yeah.

Nathaniel : Lopez, Los Angeles Times.

Mr. Lopez. Lopez.^{DF2}

(Datum no: 05)

Extract (1) shows that Nathaniel repeats the word 'Lopez' five times. This is in line with Liddle's definition of perseveration to state that it is a repetition of ideas in the form of words. This scene happens when Steve mentions his name, Nathaniel then reutters Steve's name for several times. The

repetition he makes does not even intend to demonstrate an emphasizing of argument or deeper explanation related to his answer.

Extract (2) comes as the prove of illogicality performed by Nathaniel. It is a tendency to offer bizarre explanation for things, events and explanations which contravene the laws of logic.

(2) **Nathaniel: It really blows me away that someone as great as Beethoven was the leader of Los Angeles.**

Steve : Yeah. I'm Steve Lopez, LA Times.

Nathaniel: Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z?

Steve : Yeah.

Nathaniel: Lopez, Los Angeles Times. Mr. Lopez. Lopez.

(Datum no: 05)

In Extract (2), Nathaniel begins to have a false belief that Beethoven used to be a leader of Los Angeles. Meanwhile, the fact reports that Beethoven never be a leader of Los Angeles. What inside Nathaniel's mind is quite different with the reality. Thus, his statement indicates the illogicality. The thought of Beethoven as the leader of Los Angeles appears as the product of his fantasy. Normal people as the hearers will notice a difficulty to understand what schizophrenic means due to his different way of thinking.

Then, extract (3) portrays derailment. Derailment can be understood as the phenomenon of looseness of association in speaking.

(3) **Steve** : You only got two strings.

Nathaniel: All I want to do is play music, and here's the problem that I'm having right here. This one's gone, this one's gone, this little one's out of commission. But

you get that in Cleveland public schools. **A lot of military statues in Cleveland. A very military-oriented city.**

(Datum no: 01)

Extract (3) signifies Nathaniel's looseness of association in speech as at first Nathaniel talks about the unavailability of the strings of his violin that could be obtained in Cleveland public schools. However, then he continues the sentences with unrelated topic which explains the city of Cleveland. He also does not go back to his previous explanation. This kind of phenomenon demonstrates incoherent statements and disconnected answers. Therefore, it is difficult for a schizophrenic like Nathaniel to perform a stable answer.

Extract (4) shows the occurrence of tangentiality which means a weakening of goal in answering questions and replying statements.

(4) **Steve** : I was looking for you. I noticed that you've moved.

Nathaniel: Well, it's beautiful here, because you can play music and have pigeons clapping as they take off, and right there is The Los Angeles Times Building.

Steve : Right, that's where I work

Nathaniel: **Mr. Steve Lopez, staff writer. New York, Cleveland, it doesn't matter. All I have to do is look up at that building and I know exactly where I am.**

(Datum no: 08)

The bold statement from Nathaniel portrays the occurrences of tangentiality. The

elaboration of ideas from the schizophrenic reflects a lack of drive in thinking so Nathaniel's response is not suitable to what is being discussed with Steve. Since Steve informs the building where he works in, Nathaniel answers that he knows where he is when he is just looking up to some building. It has no connection between Steve's statement with Nathaniel's reaction. Therefore, it can be an indication of tangentiality which occurs to a person who has schizophrenia.

Poverty of speech refers to a decrease in the amount of speech. It shows in extract (5) below.

(5) **Steve** : Okay. Sorry to hear that. Who could I call?

Nathaniel : 216-962-6746.

(Datum no: 16)

Extract (5) shows the phenomenon of poverty of speech experienced by Nathaniel as he merely replies the combination of numbers. In the dialogue, Steve asks the number he should call to know more about Nathaniel. Nathaniel then gives very brief answer by directly mentioning the digits of the number without giving any additional information or explanation. He does not provide more elaboration about whose number it is or so on. Here, Nathaniel answers Steve's question shortly not because he is mad at him, however, it happens since at the time the only idea appears in his mind is that number and he cannot think something else.

Extract (6) is the representation of thought blocking where the schizophrenic has

a sudden inability to finish a thought, or to recall what the thought was.

(6) **Steve** : You don't have to pay for it. It's a gift.

Nathaniel: I'm sure it's a very beautiful instrument.

Steve : Free and clear.

Nathaniel: People are very...very generous.

(Datum no: 21)

Extract (6) demonstrates that Nathaniel has a thought blocking when he is going to utter the characteristic of person who has given him the cello. When Nathaniel is in talk with Steve, he is very happy and feels so touched when someone gives him a new cello. But then, the moment he utters "very... very generous" proves that he undergoes thought blocking as he suddenly forgets what has been said by him to praise the person and suddenly stop for several seconds. Later, after several seconds he remembers it again. In other words, his mind is blocked for seconds before the words come up again. In this case, Nathaniel does not forget his previous statement.

The phenomena of Nathaniel Ayers' peculiar behaviours in Joe Wright's *The Soloist*

After discussing the phenomena of Nathaniel disorganized speech, this part discusses his peculiar behaviours. Extract (7) indicates meaningless hand motion where Nathaniel cannot control the gesture of his hands which finally ends up purposeless.

(7) *(Nathaniel attends a rehearsal musical concert with Steve, and when he sits in spectator seats, his fingers are suddenly making some motions.)*

(Datum no: 12)

From Extract (7), Nathaniel's hand motion has no purpose as sometimes the brain of person who suffers from schizophrenia is not synchronic with his hand or even body gestures. It can be understood that when Nathaniel is in a conversation with Steve in rehearsal hall, he suddenly moves his fingers with no specific meaning. Occasionally, it is the only reaction of the schizophrenic due to his mind disturbance

Extract (8) depicts Nathaniel's meaningless laughter. This peculiar behaviour means that a person who is diagnosed with schizophrenia may suddenly laugh without any understandable reason.

(8) **Steve** : San Julian and 6th. All right?
I'll drive. You walk.

Nathaniel : I know where it is...

Steve : See you in a half hour?

Nathaniel : *(Laughing)*

(Datum no. 06)

Extract (8) indicates that Nathaniel makes meaningless laughter as the situation is quite tense and he performs deviant behaviour by laughing. The scene takes place when Steve asks him to go to San Julian, the place where he can keep his new cello. When Steve is already away, he suddenly laughs without any specific meaning. It is unusual since he laughs not because he is happy as he does not want to go to that place. Moreover, there is no one there to talk to, there is also no joke or

even no other funny things, however, Nathaniel behaves strangely by laughing alone and brings no meaning. Also, his reaction is not related with the offer. For this reason, this behaviour portrays meaningless laughter experienced by the schizophrenic.

Next, extract (9) describes excessive crying where schizophrenics usually cries excessively in a random occasion and uncertain situation to express their emotion such as feeling unhappy, depressed, and confused.

(9) *(In this scene, Nathaniel is in his room, peeping through the window and suddenly witnessing a car which is covered with fire. This makes him cries a lot.)*

(Datum no: 02)

Extract (9) shows how Nathaniel cannot handle his emotion by crying excessively as he feels insecure. More particularly, he does not want that occurrence happens to him so he cannot fulfil his dreams. Witnessing a car covered with fire drives the schizophrenic to have a belief that his dreams are also can perish just like fire which burns the car down. As a man who has a very huge ambition, Nathaniel's anxiety is somehow different with others and this occurrence is one of causes Nathaniel has schizophrenia.

Next, extract (10) and (11) exposes other deviant behaviours which cover aggression and shyness. Extract (1) renders aggression which means that the

schizophrenics may become an aggressive and often quite unpredictable person.

(10) **Claydon** : God has blessed you with a gift, Nathaniel. Nothing pains God more than when we squander his blessings. You owe it to him to care for this.

Nathaniel: I don't owe God. Mr. Steve Lopez is my god.

Steve : What?

Nathaniel : Star writer for Los Angeles. Higher power flying around with wings like an angel. Mr. Steve Lopez is my... *(slamming down the table)*

Steve : He doesn't know what he's saying.

Nathaniel : Mr. Graham Claydon is going to tell me who my god is? Down by the car? Do you know who my god is, Mr. Claydon? I know who my god is!

(Datum no: 14)

The example of the aggression performed by Nathaniel is seen Extract (10). The dialogue shows how Nathaniel behaves towards Claydon as his mentor. The moment when Claydon actually only intends to say that Nathaniel needs to stay in that apartment and he is blessed by his God, he cannot accept it. This happens because he thinks that he has no other God but Steve. He gets mad and showing his aggression by pushing off Claydon and slamming down the table next to him. Not only make an aggressive behaviour towards his mentor, he also does it to his own sister, Jennifer.

Meanwhile, extract (11) reveals shyness. Patients with schizophrenia typically demonstrate increased shyness that is stable and related to reduced social functioning.

(11) **Steve** : I'm Steve Lopez, LA Times.

Nathaniel: Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z?

Steve : Yeah.

Nathaniel: Lopez, Los Angeles Times. Mr. Lopez.

Steve : What's your name?

Nathaniel: Lopez. Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Junior. N-A-T-H-A-N-I-E-L-A-N-T-H-O-N-Y-A-Y-E-R-S-J-U-N-I-O-R. Or J-R-period.

Steve : *(Offering shake-hand)*

Nathaniel: *(Refusing)* I apologize for my appearance. I've had a few setbacks.

Steve : Me, too.

(Datum no: 01)

Extract (11) portrays Nathaniel's shyness as he does not want anybody knows him and his name. He would prefer to be unknown so that nobody cares and threatens him. This exaggeration of shyness pushes him to keep his distance with the society. The occurrence as in Extract (11) happens when Steve meets Nathaniel for the very first time and they have some communication. In the end of their communication, Steve tries to get to know Nathaniel by introducing himself and offering shake-hand. However, Nathaniel does not accept it as he does not want to touch Steve. His lack of confidence shows that he cannot easily trust somebody although that person does not have bad reaction to him.

The phenomena of Nathaniel Ayers' disorganized speeches and peculiar behaviours taking place simultaneously in Joe Wright's *The Soloist*

Extract (12) shows the representations of perseveration and aggression.

(12) **Steve** : So, apparently there's a place that's a couple of blocks down that's called Lamp.

Nathaniel : I can't go... No, I can't go there.

Steve : And I... Hold on.

Nathaniel: I can't go... No, I can't go there. They smoke cigarettes. (Snapping Steve)

Steve : I talked to the guy. He says you can keep it there.

Nathaniel: They drop the butts on the ground. They do it to torment me. They just... They do it to torment me.

Steve : That's the deal. You wanna play this, you gotta do it there.

Nathaniel: I can't do that.

(Datum no: 03)

Extract (12) indicates perseverance as Nathaniel repeats 'I can't go' four times and at the same time he acts aggressively by snapping Steve and insists him not to bring him to another place. The aggression and perseverance occur as a manifestation of Nathaniel's feeling of insecurity for he thinks in that place someone will hurt him. In addition, people who feel insecure interpret reality in a different way and the more insecure a person feels the more he will try to protect himself.

Extract (13) describes illogicality and aggression performed by Nathaniel.

(13) **Steve** : Nathaniel!

Nathaniel: All I'm trying to do is work as hard as I can to clean up the tunnel. (standing in the middle of the road that is full of cars)

Steve : Hey! Nathaniel!

Nathaniel: But they don't want me to help them. I won't have it, you know. Don't want to have this degradation...

Steve : Are you out of your mind?

Nathaniel: ...because they just won't respect that Beethoven...

(Datum no: 02)

The aggression happens when Nathaniel stands in the middle of the road which is full of cars and at the same time he utters an illogical statement to say that the drivers shouting and yelling on him to move away from the streets are reluctant to help him cleaning the tunnel. In fact, they just do not want to ram Nathaniel and he does not understand that reality. Instead, he says the drivers do not want to help him cleaning the tunnel and even they do not respect Beethoven as a man Nathaniel thinks is an example for all people.

Extract (14) is the interpretation of perseverance and shyness.

(14) **Steve** : I'm Steve Lopez, LA Times.

Nathaniel: Lopez, L-O-P-E-Z?

Steve : Yeah.

Nathaniel: Lopez, Los Angeles Times. Mr. Lopez.

Steve : What's your name?

Nathaniel: Lopez. **Nathaniel** Anthony Ayers Junior. N-A-T-H-A-N-I-E-L-A-N-T-H-O-N-Y-A-Y-E-R-S-J-U-N-I-O-R. Or J-R-period.

Steve : (*Offering shake-hand*)

(Datum no: 01)

The occurrence of repetition of word 'Lopez' indicates perseverance which is accompanied by shyness showed by the character. The shyness is signified by the unwillingness of Nathaniel to shaking his hands with Mr. Lopez. The reluctance of

Nathaniel for shaking his hands with someone who wants to know him indicates that he has too much shyness even the guy behaves nicely. The schizophrenic is really worried to be known by other men. As Nathaniel has been given the name 'Lopez', then he utters it four times as sometimes it is the only word appearing in schizophrenic's mind.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Six types of disorganized speech are found in Nathaniel Ayers' utterances in Joe Wright's *The Soloist* such as perseveration, illogicality, derailment, tangentiality, poverty of speech and thought blocking. Perseveration is a repetition of words, phrases, or sentences. Meanwhile, illogicality is utterances which do not make any sense as the schizophrenic fails to understand how the civilization really works. Then, derailment is unrelated topic of discourse while tangentiality is incoherent response if the schizophrenic is questioned. Poverty of speech is a decreased amount of speech or even a monosyllabic answer. Last, thought blocking is a sudden stop in the middle of speaking as the patient is unable to recall the words which are going to be uttered.

Five kinds of peculiar behaviour are encountered by Nathaniel Ayers in Joe Wright's *The Soloist* such as meaningless hand motion, meaningless laughter, excessive crying and also other deviant behaviours which cover aggression and shyness.

Meaningless hand motion is any hand and/or finger movement which have no clear purpose. Meanwhile, meaningless laughter is an occasion of sudden laughter without any specific reason. Afterwards, Excessive crying is continuous weeping or sobbing caused by great fear and depression. Last, aggression is an exaggeration of response by giving rude replies, showing anger, attacking somebody and doing something that has a big risk while shyness is an overestimation of lack of confidence as the schizophrenic tries to avoid other persons and stay in the darkness.

The findings suggest that disorganized speech and peculiar behaviour may take place simultaneously. They are perseveration and aggression, illogicality and aggression, and perseveration and shyness. This indicates that the abnormal performances of the schizophrenic could be either in the form of utterances and/or behaviours as his problematic perception influence deviant productions.

Suggestions

The results of this study lead to the suggestions to the students of English Literature especially those who are majoring in linguistics are suggested to sharpen their knowledge in psycholinguistics focusing on language disorder which is influenced by mental illness since it is quite important to learn how human's mind works. Also, it helps us to deal with people suffered from language abnormalities.

Moreover, it is suggested for all readers from any occupation to more tolerate the existence of people with these language disorders since they may be seen as freaks but they also have some life as Mental health experts say “the simple act of being someone’s friend can change his brain chemistry and improve his functioning in the world”.

Hence, other researchers are suggested to conduct the study using other kinds of approaches to make deeper understanding related to this issue. This research only focuses on disorganized speeches and peculiar behaviours performed by the schizophrenic. Thus, another analysis from different approach is surely needed to enrich the future research.

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