

## MOTHERESE IN *DANIEL TIGER'S NEIGHBORHOOD* TELEVISION SERIES: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

The researcher investigates motherese in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series using a psycholinguistic approach. This research has three objectives: (1) to reveal the characteristics of motherese used in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series based on the syntactic features; (2) to reveal the characteristics of motherese used in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series based on the discourse features; and (3) to describe the functions of the use of motherese in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series. This research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data were in the form of utterances, while the contexts of the data were the adult-children conversations in the series. Meanwhile, the sources of the data were the videos of several episodes of *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series and their transcript. The data were collected by selecting the dialogues containing motherese. The primary instrument of this research was the researcher, while the secondary instrument was a data sheet. The findings show that there are five characteristics of motherese based on syntactic features which are appeared at *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*. First, the MLU of the series is 5.5 which is lower than adult's MLU. Second, the use of utterances with verb is high, but the form of the verb and modifiers is limited. Third, subordinate clause is rarely being used. Fourth, verbless utterances appear quite often. Fifth, content words are being used more than function words. Meanwhile, for characteristics of motherese based on discourse features, there are 3 of them. First, interrogative and imperative sentences have very high frequency. Second, fluent and intelligible speech does not occur that much in the series. Third, the use of repetitions is really low. Regarding the functions, there are two functions of motherese which can be found in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*. They are analytical function and social function. Analytical function is mostly dominated by the use of primary stress and longer duration on several important words of the utterances. Meanwhile, social function is dominated by the use of higher pitch which indicates that the speech addressed to the children not to adults.

**Keywords:** psycholinguistics, motherese, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series

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### BACKGROUND

Children are in their starting stages of language learning process. Their language ability is less compared to adults. Thus, language which is uttered by children sounds to be a little bit different compared to the language uttered by adults. Hence, it can be said that children speak children's

language. However, the differences between children's language and adults' language are not like the differences between two languages from two different countries. In children's language, there are several features which are lacked if it is compared to the language of adults. Therefore, when adults are talking to children, they tend to adjust their speech to match children's

language ability. Adult will modify their utterances so that the children will understand the meaning of the utterances. Those kinds of modifications done by adult when they are talking to children are often called as motherese.

According to Elliot (1981: 150), motherese is speech from adults which is specifically addressed to children. When adults talk to children, they do not use the same language like when they are talking to fellow adults. Adults' speech to children is usually simpler. They will not use the complex sentence construction or difficult vocabulary. Thus, it makes the speech easier for children to understand.

In this modern era, motherese is not only provided by adults around the children, but also provided by other media such as television. Television brings a lot of programs which are produced for children from toddlers, pre-school aged children, even school-aged children. The programs which are particularly produced for pre-school aged children need to pay attention on the use of language since their target viewers' language ability is still low. The scriptwriters of the programs play an essential role in the language compatibility of the program towards the target viewers. Thus, the programs for pre-school aged

children usually apply motherese so that the children can understand the utterances in the programs easily.

Since motherese is the language which is being used by adults when addressing to children, there must be some characteristics of the language itself. Snow and Ferguson (in Elliot, 1981: 151) describe the modifications in term of syntactic features and discourse features which appear to be characteristics of motherese as presented below.

- 1) Syntactic features
  - a) Shorter Mean Length of Utterances (MLU)
  - b) Fewer verb forms and modifiers
  - c) Fewer subordinate clauses
  - d) More verbless utterances
  - e) More content words, fewer function words
- 2) Discourse features
  - a) More interrogatives and imperatives
  - b) More fluent and intelligible speech
  - c) More repetitions

Adults have motivation to modify their language when they are talking to children. In other words, when adults use motherese, it is not simply because they want it but it also serves several functions. Garnica in Elliot (1981: 161) proposes that

motherese serves two function: analytic function and social function.

Based on the theories stated in the literature review, the researcher focuses on identifying motherese used in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series. *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is an American-Canadian animated children television series. It is produced by The Fred Rogers Company, 9 Story Media Group, and Out of the Blue Enterprises. It first aired on most PBS station on September 3, 2012. The series is targeted at preschool-aged children. Therefore, to make this research more focused, the researcher limits the problem of the discussion. The researcher focuses only on the characteristics based on syntactic features, discourse features, and functions of motherese found in the series.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. However, this research used descriptive qualitative method as the main methodology. Using a descriptive analysis, the researcher tried to describe motherese which occurred in the data. The researcher observed all motherese found in the data and then explained them in analysis based on the syntactic features, discourse features, and

the functions of the use of motherese in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series. Descriptive qualitative method was employed to discover motherese found in the transcript and verify them. A descriptive method is a kind of research method using the technique of searching, collecting, classifying, analyzing the data, interpreting them, and finally drawing a conclusion (Surakhmad, 1994:147). Furthermore, quantitative method was also being used to strengthen the descriptions that have been made in words

This research used psycholinguistics as the approach which was concerned on motherese. Psycholinguistics is the study of mental process including the production, comprehension, and storage of spoken and written language (Warren, 2013: 20). Thus, psycholinguistics could reveal the characteristics and functions of motherese in television series; *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* in those are the objectives of this study.

The data of this research were the utterances which were uttered by the adults characters in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* when conversing with Daniel, who is the main character in the series. The utterances which were showing the characteristics and reasons of the use of motherese were

considered as the data of this research. The data were gained from the transcript of the conversation between the main characters.

Furthermore, the data were in the form of utterances. Then, the contexts of the data were the adult-children conversations in the series. Meanwhile, the source of the data is the videos of several episodes of *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series which were downloaded from the internet

In this research, the main instrument was the researcher herself. Meanwhile, the secondary instrument was a data sheet. For the data collection techniques, the researcher applied the following steps: transcribed the dialogue, organized and classified the data, and transferred the data into data sheet. Meanwhile, to analyze the data, there are several steps: classified the data based on the theory, interpreted and described the form of motherese found in the data, and drew conclusions. In addition, to gain trustworthiness, the researcher conducted data triangulation to check the accuracy of the data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Regarding the findings of the research, there are five characteristics of motherese based on syntactic features which appear at *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*.

First, the MLU of the series is 5.5 which is lower than adult's MLU. Second, the use of utterances with verb is high, but the form of the verb and modifiers is limited. Third, subordinate clause is rarely being used. Fourth, verbless utterances appear quite often. Fifth, content words are being used more than function words.

Meanwhile, there are 3 characteristics of motherese based on discourse features. First, interrogative and imperative sentences have very high frequency. Second, fluent and intelligible speech does not occur that much in the series. Third, the use of repetitions is really low.

In terms of functions, there are two functions of motherese which can be found in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*. Analytical function and social function appear at the same number. First, analytical function is dominated by the use of primary stress and longer duration in several words to show their importance. Second, social function is dominated by the use of higher pitch. It is aimed to show that the speech is addressed to children and not to adults.

In the following discussion, the researcher provides several examples along with the explanation regarding the characteristics based on syntactic features,

discourse features, and functions of motherese in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series.

The first syntactic feature is MLU. Mean Length of Utterances is a measurement which is used to calculate the linguistic productivity of children. In this research, the MLU is calculated by dividing the number of words with the number of the utterance of the data. Based on the data, there are 308 words in 56 utterances. The result then shows that the average MLU of this series is 5.5. However, it actually consists of different length of utterances in every datum. There are data which have short, long, or just medium length of utterances. For example, the length of utterances of datum 24 is the shortest out of 28 data.

Daniel : Bell!  
**Daniel's Dad : And my pencil?**  
**(rising intonation)**  
 Daniel : Pencil!  
 (Datum 24)

Daniel and his Dad want to put a door bell on the door of Daniel's playhouse. Daniel helps his Dad by getting what his Dad needs. In this datum, his Dad asks for a pencil. He only uses an utterance consisting of 3 words. The utterance has the shortest length of utterances compared to other data.

Second, in this series, there are high occurrences of verb forms which appear 25 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 89.3%. However, despite the high frequency of the use of verb form utterances, the series only use few forms of tenses. They are simple present tense, simple future tense, and present continuous tense. Meanwhile, the use of modifiers is really low. Based on the findings, simple present tense is the most frequently used in this series. Datum 2 is the example of the use of simple present tense.

Daniel's Mom : **Just think! Each (stressed) and every (stressed) snowflake is different.**  
 Daniel : Yeah! But they are just like a little dot for me.  
 (Datum 2)

In this conversation, Daniel's Mom explains to Daniel that every snowflake has different shape. Here, Daniel's Mom uses simple present tense in her utterances. The use of present tense represents the current situation. Moreover, the utterances do not have any modifiers. It shows that Daniel's Mom simplifies her utterances because she is talking to Daniel.

Third is subordinate clause. A simple sentence has just one clause. On the other hand, a complex sentence consists of more than one clause: the main clause and

subordinate clause. Thus, it would be hard for children to understand the meaning of the sentences. Therefore, the use of subordinate clause is quite low in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* since the series is targeted for children. Subordinate clause occurs 4 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 14.3%. There are four data using subordinate clause. An example is datum 3.

Daniel : Yeah! But they are just like a little dot for me.  
**Daniel's Mom: Yes. But if you could look really (stressed) close, you'll see that each one is different.**  
 (Datum 3)

Daniel's Mom explains that every snowflake is different if Daniel could look really close. In the utterance "*But if you could look really close, you'll see that each one is different*", there are two clauses. The first clause is "*But if you could look really close*" which is the subordinate clause. The second clause is "*You'll see that each one is different*" which is the main clause. Thus, the utterance uses complex sentence form. The use of complex sentence will make the sentence hard to understand for children. It is because the two clauses will confuse children to determine the meaning of the utterance.

Fourth, verbless sentence is construction that lacks a verb but functions as sentence. Here, it is considered as sentence since it has its function to express idea. Verbless utterance is adults' effort to simplify their sentence when they are talking to children. In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, the use of verbless utterances is quite high. It occurs 14 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 50%. Datum 9 is the example of the use of verbless utterances.

Daniel : Mom, I don't want to be the snowflake anymore.  
 Daniel's Mom : **You don't (stressed)? Why not? (rising intonation)**  
 (Datum 9)

The conversation above occurs when Daniel is about to say his line in the stage, but suddenly he feels nervous then he runs to his mother. He said to his mother that he does not want to be the snowflake of the show anymore. Daniel's Mom asks Daniel why he does not want to be the snowflake anymore. In her second utterance, she uses verbless utterance by saying only "*Why not?*". In that utterance, the verb cannot be found. However, the utterance itself has been expressed its idea to ask Daniel about his reason of why he does not want to be the

snowflake anymore. Therefore, it will be more appropriate to use shorter utterances for children if the shorter utterance itself has represented the idea of it.

Fifth is more content words, fewer function words. Content words give the most important information while function words are used to stitch those words together. It can be said that content words are the main parts. Therefore, when adults are talking to children, they will use more content words so that the utterances will be more understandable for children. By using more content words than function words, adults attempt to simplify their utterances. The use of more content words and fewer function words in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is quite high. It appears 18 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 64.3%. The example of the use of more content words and fewer function words can be seen in datum 4.

**Daniel's Dad : Ready to get going? (higher pitch)**

Daniel & Mom: Yes!!

(Datum 4)

It is Snowflake Day. The neighborhood is celebrating it by doing a show at the garden. Daniel and his parents are about to go to the garden. In the bold part, Daniel's Dad asks Daniel and Daniel's

Mom whether they are ready to go to the garden. In his utterances, he uses 3 content words; they are ready (adjective), get (verb), and going (verb). Meanwhile, he only uses 1 function word; to (preposition). Thus, it can be concluded that Daniel's Dad simplifies his utterance by using more content words and fewer function words. The purpose is to make Daniel understand the utterance easily since it consists of more informative parts rather than decorative parts.

Meanwhile, in terms of discourse features, first is interrogatives and imperatives. An interrogative sentence is a sentence that asks a question whether or not it contains an interrogative word. It always ends with question mark. Meanwhile, an imperative sentence is type of sentence that gives advice or instruction or that expresses a request or command. An imperative sentence typically begins with the base form of a verb. An imperative sentence can end with exclamation mark or period. In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, the use of interrogatives and imperatives has quite high frequency. It appears 25 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 89.3%. An example of interrogatives is datum 17.

**Daniel's Dad : How is it going down there? (higher pitch)**

Daniel : Tiger-tastic! I'm

done painting. I did the whole bottom of the door.

(Datum 17)

The conversation above occurs when Daniel and his Dad is painting the door of Daniel's playhouse. They have deal that Daniel's dad paints the top part of the door while Daniel paints the bottom. During the process of painting, Daniel's Dad checks Daniel's work. He uses interrogative and asks Daniel's condition. By using interrogative, Daniel's Dad expects that Daniel will respond to his utterances. Fortunately, Daniel seems to understand so he gives response by saying that he has finished painting the whole bottom of the door. Here, it can be seen how interrogative stimulate children to respond adult's utterances. Besides interrogatives, imperative sentences also perform the same function. However, different from interrogatives which stimulate response in the form of words, imperatives stimulate children's response in their action.

Second is speaking fluently and intelligible speech. Speaking fluently means speaking in a smooth and easy way. Meanwhile, intelligible speech means using the simple language which is indicated by the use of simple words and simple sentence structure so that the hearer

can understand the speaker's speech easily. Adults' utterances to other adults usually are consisted of more than 10 words. It means that if adults use more than 10 words, it will be hard for children to understand. Fluent and intelligible speech itself does not occur that much in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*. It only appears 6 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 21.4%. An example of fluent and intelligible speech can be found in datum 3.

Daniel : Yeah! But they are just like a little dot for me.

**Daniel's Mom: Yes. But if you could look really (stressed) close, you'll see that each one is different.**

(Datum 3)

This conversation occurs when Daniel and his parents greet each other on Snowflake Day. Daniel's Mom says that every single snowflake has different shape. However, Daniel responds to her saying that they are just like a little dot for him. His Mom then explains that if he looks really close he will find the differences between each snowflake. In her second utterance, Daniel's Mom uses a long utterance which consists of more than 10 words. It shows that she speaks fluently and intelligible. However, due to the long utterance, it might

be confusing for children to understand the meaning of the sentence. It is because children's language ability still lacks compared to adults. So it will be better to use shorter utterances for children.

Third is repetition. Repetition is an instance of a word, phrase, clause, or sentence more than once in a short passage. It can be complete, partial, or semantic repetition. In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* itself, the use of repetition is very low. It only appears 5 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 17.8%. It is contradictory to the statement that motherese uses many repetitions. An example of the use of repetition can be found in datum 1.

Daniel's Dad : **Look at that! It's snowing (stressed) on snowflake (stressed) day. Grr-ific!**

Daniel : So many snowflakes like this snowflake and this snowflake.

(Datum 1)

It is Snowflake Day. Daniel and his parents greet each other at the yard. The snow starts to fall when Daniel and her parents are talking at the yard. Daniel's Dad points it out by saying the bold parts. In his utterance, it can be seen that he repeat the word *snow* in *snowing* and *snowflake*. Here, Daniel's Dad does not repeat his whole

sentence, not even a whole word. Thus, it can be categorized as partial repetition.

Regarding the functions, the first is analytical function. Some characteristics of motherese help the children analyze the linguistics content of the speech. For example, rising intonation at the end of a sentence signaled the completion of a linguistic unit. Another example is the use of primary stress and longer duration on verbs and color term to draw attention to the main informative units of the sentence. In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, analytical function appears 14 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 50%. An example of analytical function can be seen in datum 13.

Daniel : Is it done?

Daniel's Dad : **No. I still have to put the door on the house. See? (rising intonation)**

(Datum 13)

The conversation above occurs when Daniel approach his Dad who is making a playhouse for Daniel. Daniel asks whether the playhouse has done. Daniel's Dad replies that the playhouse has not done yet. He says that he still needs to put the door of the playhouse. In his third utterances, Daniel's Dad raises his intonation at the end of it. It is to show the completion of a linguistic unit. Here, his last utterance only consists of one word. However, it functions as a sentence. It

might be confusing for children if adults speak that utterance using the standard tone. Thus, the rising intonation at the end of the utterance helps children to understand that adults have completed their utterances.

Second is social function. Other features of motherese serve the social function of regulating the conversation between adult and child and gaining and maintaining the child's attention. For example is higher pitch of motherese indicates that the speech is addressed to the child and not some other adults. Another example is rising-final intonation that can also be seen as a signal to the children that this is now their turn in the conversational sequence. In *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* itself, social function occurs 14 times out of 28 data with the percentage of 50%. It is dominated by the use of higher pitch. Here is the example.

**Daniel's Dad : Ready to get  
going? (higher  
pitch)**

Daniel & Mom: Yes!!

(Datum 4)

It is Snowflake Day and there is a Snowflake Show at the garden. Daniel and his parents are getting ready to go the garden. Daniel's Dad asks Daniel and his Mom whether they are ready to go to the garden. He speaks his utterance in higher

pitch. It is to show that he is actually speaking to Daniel not to anyone else. The use of higher pitch helps children to understand that the speech is directed to them.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

### Conclusion

There are five characteristics of motherese based on syntactic features in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series. They are short MLU, few verb forms and modifiers, few subordinate clause, verbless utterances, and more content words, fewer function words. Those characteristics show that adults modify their language when talking to young children. By looking at the characteristics which appear, it can be seen how adults tend to simplify their utterances when the speech is addressed to children. This is related to children's language ability which is still lack compared to adults'.

In terms of the characteristics of motherese based on discourse features, there are 3 of them. Interrogative and imperative sentences have very high frequency in *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*. The series uses a lot of interrogative and imperative utterances in their conversation. Interrogative sentences mean to stimulate children to give responses to the question, while imperative sentences are intended to

give command to children and stimulate children to respond them. Therefore, the use of interrogatives and imperatives will stimulate children to respond to adult's utterances. Meanwhile, fluent and intelligible speech as well as repetitions do not appear that much in this series.

Regarding the functions of motherese, there are two functions which can be found in this *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* television series. First is analytical function which is dominated by the use of primary stress and longer duration. This function assists children analyze the linguistics content of the utterances. The second function is social function which is dominated by the use of higher pitch. The use of higher pitch is to let the children know that the speech is addressed to children not to adult. Therefore, the use of both functions in the series is important to help children understand adult's utterance easily. Moreover, the balance occurrence of both functions shows that *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* helps children to understand the functions of the utterances equally.

### **Suggestions**

In reference to the findings of the research there are several suggestions

proposed by the researcher which can be given to the some parties. The future researcher can use other resources as the object of the research since motherese can also be found in children movie and even songs, which targeted children as their viewers. Moreover, they can also analyze the effects which are caused by the employment of motherese in daily conversation between adults and children. The English students who want to create a literary work with motherese as its theme can learn about the analysis of motherese. Thus, they know the characteristics and functions of motherese so that it will help them in the process of writing. In addition, studying about motherese will help them know the use of motherese in real life.

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