

A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS ON FERAL CHILDREN AS SEEN IN THE CHARACTERS OF VICTORIA AND LILLY IN *MAMA* MOVIE

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Abstract

The researcher investigates the phenomenon of feral children in *MAMA* movie using a psycholinguistics approach. This research has two objectives: (1) to identify and reveal the speech disfluencies shown by the characters of Victoria Desange and Lilly Desange in *MAMA* movie and (2) to describe how the society helps Victoria Desange and Lilly Desange develop their language ability as reflected in *MAMA* movie. This research employed qualitative method. The data were in the form of utterances and pictures, while the contexts of the data were the conversations in the movie. Meanwhile, the sources of the data were *MAMA* movie and its transcript. The data were collected by selecting the dialogues containing speech disfluencies. The primary instrument of this research was the researcher, while the secondary instrument was a data sheet. The results of this research are stated as follows. First, out of nine types of speech disfluencies, six types of speech disfluencies shown by Victoria and Lilly in *MAMA* movie. The disfluencies shown by Victoria and Lilly in *MAMA* movie are hesitation, phrase/sentence repetition, word repetition, prolongations, block and others. The disfluencies that Victoria and Lilly do not experience are interjection, phrase/sentence revision and part-word repetition. From 43 data found in the movie, hesitation and word-repetition have the biggest number of occurrence. Meanwhile, for the treatments done to develop the language ability of the children, there are parties who are involved in helping the children. The parties consist of families and professionals. In family members, it is found that there are five types of domain in parenting that are shown in *MAMA* movie. The five domains are protection, reciprocity, control, guided learning, and group participation. In addition, the role of professionals in giving the treatments to the feral children is also found in *MAMA* movie. Those professionals who are involved consist of the clinicians and hypnotherapists.

Keywords: psycholinguistics, feral children, *MAMA* movie

BACKGROUND

In acquiring the first language, humans are believed to learn new language since the early age of 6-8 months. It is started at around 6-8 months where children start to babble or produce repetitive syllables. At the age of 10-12 months, children will tend to speak their first words. The next stage is at around age of 20-24

months when they start to construct and combine words by words and by the age of 36-48 months, they start to learn basic vocabularies, syntax, and pronunciation of their language. Children develop their language spontaneously. They acquire new words unconsciously, and even without instruction or even command from their parents. They do this by imitating what they heard.

The process of acquiring the first language is related to the critical period hypothesis. It is believed that primary language acquisition mostly occurs during the critical period which happens until the puberty age or around the age of 13. However, if there is no language input at all, then the children will never receive a full command of language especially the grammatical system. There are some factors that cause children to be unable to acquire a language. One of the causes that makes children do not go through language acquisition is when the children do not interact with the society around them. It can happen when the children have no access or chance to socialize. Those children are classified as feral children or wild children.

A feral child, or sometimes called as a wild child, is commonly known as a child who has lived isolated from human contact from a very young age, and has no (or little) experience of human care, loving or social behavior, and, crucially, of human language because in some cases they do not get any language input at all. It is strengthened by Hudson (2000: 175) who states that feral children or wild children are the abandoned or isolated children who grow up without the normal condition for language learning, and so without language.

Some feral children might lose the ability to speak, and others even remain mute. Thus, feral children usually have difficulties in delivering their speech, or in other words, they have speech disfluency. To understand the nature of speech disfluencies, it is a must to consider the range of disfluencies that may occur in speech. Campbell and Hill (in Ward, 2006: 5) have identified a number of major disfluency types:

- a) Hesitation
- b) Interjection
- c) Phrase/sentence revision
- d) Phrase/sentence repetition
- e) Word repetition
- f) Part-word repetition
- g) Prolongation
- h) Block
- i) Others

Concerning the language disorders that the children might have, Whitbourne and Halgin (2013: 281) state there are few treatment programs to improve the language deficits of feral children. The treatment programs then can proceed in which children themselves, families, and professionals who share their perspectives on the children's symptoms and so that they can decide the therapeutic goals.

Based on the theories stated in the literature review, the researcher focuses on identifying the phenomenon of feral children in *MAMA* movie. Therefore, to make this research more focused, the researcher limits the problem of the discussion to the types of disfluency shown by the characters in *MAMA* movie, and how the society around the children helps the children develop their language ability as found in the series.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the qualitative method was employed. By going through descriptive analysis, the researcher tried to describe speech disfluencies and the treatments for them by observing, analyzing, and explaining the data which were found in *MAMA* movie. The psycholinguistics approach was used in this research since this research focuses on the phenomenon of language and mind which is studied under psycholinguistics field.

The data of this research were in the form of the utterances made by the characters in *MAMA* movie. Pictures also used as the data in this research. The utterances which were showing the disfluency and the treatments of them were considered as the data of this research. The data were obtained from the transcript of the

conversation among the main characters in the movie. Furthermore, the contexts of the data were the conversations among the characters in the movie. Meanwhile, the source of the data is *MAMA* movie which was downloaded from the Internet. In this research, the researcher was the major instrument. In analyzing the data, the researcher also involved secondary instrument which was, in this case, data sheets.

Moreover, note taking technique was used to collect in-depth data for the research. By taking notes, the researcher records the essence of the information. To analyze the data, the researcher develops the research by going through some analysis steps; categorizing, classifying, analyzing, discussing, and reporting. In addition, to gaining trustworthiness, the researcher conducted data triangulation to check the validity of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the findings of the research, there are six types of speech disfluencies that appear in *MAMA* movie. The disfluencies that appear in *MAMA* movie are *hesitation*, *phrase/sentence repetition*, *word repetition*, *prolongations*, *block* and *others*. In addition, the

disfluencies that are not experienced by Victoria and Lilly are *interjection*, *phrase/sentence revision* and *part-word repetition*. Those disfluencies are not shown by the children since they do not talk much.

Meanwhile, there are two parties that are involved in the treatment process. Those parties consist of family members and professionals. In family members, it is found that there are five types of domain in parenting that are shown in *MAMA* movie. The five domains are *protection*, *reciprocity*, *control*, *group learning*, and *group participation*. In addition, the role of professionals in giving the treatments for the feral children is also found in the *MAMA* movie. The professionals who are involved are the clinicians and hypnotherapists.

In the following discussion, the researcher provides several examples along with the explanation related to the types of speech disfluency and the treatments for them as portrayed in *MAMA* movie.

The most frequently appeared disfluency in the movie is hesitation, which is defined as the condition when the speaker feels unsure of the text and perhaps lacking in confidence in speaking. The following two examples from the movie give further description of hesitation.

Dr. Dreyfuss : Okay Victoria, are you feel relaxed? Are you sleepy? I want you to tell me the story again. Can you tell me the story?.

Victoria : **(Inhale, silent for 4 seconds)**Long time ago, a lady ran away from the hospital. (Inhale, exhale)...she took her baby with her.

(Datum no. 2)

Based on the dialogue above, it can be seen that the hesitation happened when Victoria takes a few seconds before she starts answering the question. She takes about 4 seconds before she utters her speech. The example is clearly the evidence that the phenomenon of hesitation is not always in the form of 2-sec pauses or more. In the datum, it is actually in the form of a 4-sec pause. This one disfluency happens because of the condition of Sabina at the moment. She feels doubtful to talk to a person that keeps asking about something which is very emotional to her. However, Victoria still willing to continue to answer the question and done the hypnotherapy session. Another example of hesitation is shown as in the following dialogue.

- Dr. Dreyfuss : Okay Victoria, are you feel relaxed? Are you sleepy? Okay Victoria, I want you to tell me about *MAMA*. Where is she live?
- Victoria : **(pause)** the walls.
- Dr. Dreyfuss :Is she here with us right now?
- Victoria :**(pause)** I don'tknow.

(Datum no. 11)

The dialogue above shows another hypnotherapy session held by Dr. Dreyfuss. Similar to the other hypnotherapy session, Dr. Dreyfuss starts by asking Victoria's condition at that moment. The therapy continues if Victoria feels comfortable enough and not feeling suppressed. However, this time, Dr. Dreyfuss tends to give more pressure to Victoria within the therapy session. Dr. Dreyfuss continues to ask Victoria about *MAMA*. Victoria starts to feel uncomfortable in answering the questions.

Victoria's utterance in this case seems to be strange because she does not immediately answer the questions from Dr. Dreyfuss. She takes few seconds before starting to answer the question to show the inconvenience. Victoria seems annoyed and she tends to take longer time in answering the questions. Another example of speech disfluency found in the movie is word repetition. Silverman (1992: 20) defines

word repetition as the repetition of an entire word. While a word may be repeated multiple times, word repetitions usually repeated only once or twice. The example of word repetition by the character is presented in the following.

- Uncle Luke :Lily, is that you? I brought something for you, Victoria, for your eyes (giving glasses).
- Victoria :(Screaming and Growling)**Daddy?...Dad...Dad..**

(Datum no. 2)

Victoria repeats the word **Dad** because she cannot express something in her mind. This can be explained by analyzing the pattern of her utterance. At first, she tends to avoid to shows the words avoidance and refuse to talk to her Uncle. However, after their uncle succeeds in convincing them, Victoria is willing to talk to her uncle. However, she cannot understand what she wants to say and expresses. At the end, she gives up and starts approaching her uncle, thinking that he is her dad. Victoria then stops to think and she just keeps repeating the word **Dad**, as she hugs uncle Luke for a few moments.

Meanwhile, in terms of the treatments for feral children, there are found that some parties in the children surrounding are giving big influences to the children.

Those parties consist of family members and professionals. In family members, it is found that there are five types of domain in parenting that are shown in *MAMA* movie. The researcher provides several examples along with the explanation related to the treatments for feral children as portrayed in *MAMA* movie.

Annabelle : **Lilly? Lilly, are you okay? How did you get down here? Come here (hugging Lilly)**
Lilly : (silent)

(Datum B no. 13)

The conversation above takes place in the backyard, when Annabelle found Lilly laying on the ground in the morning. Annabelle finds out that Lilly disappeared from the room and slept at the backyard. Annabelle runs to Lilly and brings her back inside the home. Here, Annabelle shows the protection domain to Lilly. Annabelle shows how she cares about Lilly's unusual behavior and she tries to help Lilly. It strongly shows the relation between mother and infant when Annabelle gives such protection to Lilly and when she gets panic when she finds Lilly disappeared from the room.

Another parenting domain that is shown in the movie is *control* domain. In the control domain, interactions between parents

and children typically involve conflict because parents want one thing and so does the child. The control domain is often happen when the children misbehave. In such circumstances, parents can use their power advantage to discourage the misbehavior through various means such as reasoning, social isolation, and physical punishment. The examples and explanations are presented below.

Lilly : (Screaming, shouting and wriggling)
Annabelle: **Okay. Stop, stop it. It is okay. Come on (hugs Lilly)**
Lilly :(calms down)
Annabelle : Okay. (smiling)

(Datum no. 14)

The control domain is clearly seen in the dialogue above. The dialogue happens when Annabelle carries Lilly back inside the home after she found her sleeping at the backyard. However, Lilly does not stop screaming, revolting and even slaps Annabele. Annabelle tries to hug Lilly tightly and does not let her go. By saying the word **Stop**, Annabelle tries to control Lilly to be calm. Surprisingly, Lilly becomes quiet and stops screaming.

In *MAMA* movie, the role of clinicians and hypnotherapist are being portrayed. The occurrences of the treatments done by the professionals are 9 out of 28

times. The result shows that professionals do have big roles in helping the feral children to get their language ability back. The explanations as well as examples for each party who is involved will be presented as follows.



(Datum no. 19)

In the picture above, it can be seen that there are two clinicians who are monitoring and observing Lilly's activities in the specially designed room. The clinicians take notes, and even record everything done by Victoria and Lilly. They analyze the activity progress of the children by taking note what the children do in the room every single day. Recording, video tapping, taking pictures sometimes also needed to make the clinicians easier in analyzing the results. Thus, the role of clinicians for the treatments of Victoria and Lilly is really important here. In addition, the role of a hypnotherapist in giving the treatment for feral children is also reflected

in the movie. The example as well as the explanation is presented below.

Dr. Dreyfuss : **Okay Victoria, are you nice relaxed? Are you feel sleepy? I want you to tell me the story, can you?**

Victoria : Long time ago, a lady ran away from the hospital.

Dr. Dreyfuss : **Go on Victoria, tell me.**

(Datum no. 3)

Dr. Dreyfuss held a hypnotherapy session in order to make Victoria feel doubtless to talk. The language skill of a speech language pathologist here really affects the development of Victoria herself. Words such as **Okay, Can you, Go on**, are some of the examples of the domination and power to control the patient so that the patient, in this case is Victoria, willing to give responses.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

In terms of the disfluency types, out of nine types, six types of speech disfluency are shown by Victoria and Lilly in *MAMA* movie. The disfluencies that appear in *MAMA* movie are *hesitation, phrase/sentence repetition, word repetition, prolongations, block* and *others*. The most-

occurred disfluencies shown by Victoria and Lilly are hesitation and word repetition. Meanwhile, the disfluencies that Victoria and Lilly do not experience are interjection, phrase/sentence revision and part-word repetition. Those disfluencies are not shown by the children since they do not talk much.

Related to the treatments that are done to develop the language ability of Victoria and Lilly, there are two parties who are involved in the treatment process for the feral children. Families and professionals are the parties who are involved in giving the treatments for Victoria and Lilly. Family members, especially parenting strategies to help the feral children develop their language ability are really reflected in *MAMA* movie.

It is found that there are five types of domain in parenting strategies that are portrayed by the family members in *MAMA* movie. The five domains are protection, reciprocity, control, group learning, and group participation. All of the domains do give big influences in the mental development of the feral children. In addition, the role of professionals in giving the treatments for the feral children is also found in the *MAMA* movie. Those professionals who are involved consist of the clinicians and hypnotherapist.

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. This research focuses on identifying and describing the types of disfluencies and also describing the treatments to help people with speech disfluencies. The future researcher can use other resources as the object of the research related to feral children. The future researcher also can observe the linguistic characteristics shown by people with speech disfluencies.

Moreover, since this movie provides only a few data, other researchers can use other movies that contain more data for their research. To the English students who want to create a literary work about feral child as its theme, they can learn about the analysis of speech disorders and the treatments for them. Thus, they know the types and the treatments so that it will help them in the process of writing. In addition, studying about feral children will help them know the importance of treating people with mental retardation in real life.

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