

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF HEDGES BY YOUNG CHILDREN

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## Abstract

Children tend to have simple pronunciation and language compared to adults. However, children will also experience language development according to their age such as Noah Ritter, who was five years old when interviewed by television stations until invited to the Ellen Show two years later when Noah was seven years old. Noah Ritter is also nicknamed "The Apparently Kid" because he often says "apparently" in his sentences. In this case, there is a child who can speak using hedges whereas the hedges themselves are usually used by adults. This study aimed to describe the use of hedges in young children and explain some of the factors and causes why young children can use hedges like adults. The method used in this research was a descriptive qualitative method. For the results and discussion, the researchers found that a child can use hedges from many factors such as the environment from both family and friends and how often Noah Ritter always hears and imitates the language used by his parents. As a result, in language development, he can apply hedges. It can be concluded that the hedges used by children are the result of children imitating their environment because children often listen to adults talk and indirectly understand the context of their use even though they do not fully understand.

**Keywords:** Hedges, Children Language, Social Interaction, Language Development, Language Acquisition.

## I. Introduction

The use of language or communication in children should not escape our attention because children need to develop their language from a young age and what changes they use to be able to communicate with the outside world. Since infancy, language is learned through social interaction with other people, through listening opportunities, and testing sound and word. In addition, children's grammar is based on judgment and children can derive words from a conversation. Hedges may be a word or phrase utilized in a sentence to precise ambiguity, probability, or

indecisiveness about the rest of the sentence, instead of full accuracy, certainty, or decisiveness. A hedge is an adjective or adverb, but it also can contain a clause like one among the uses of the tag question. In some cases, hedging is often considered a sort of euphemism. Linguists consider hedging to be a tool of the epistemic modality; allows speakers and writers to signal a level of care making statements. Lakoff (1972) analyzes hedges as a word who have meanings that implicitly make the ambiguity of a word and make it fuzzier or less fuzzy. He stated that a word or phrase can demonstrate the power of hedges itself (like rather,

very, during a manner of speaking) which sets a limit on linguistic items to interpret them as hedges. So, in this context hedges are often used to express something that is uncertain, or its meaning shows doubt and hedges may be a word that sounds less direct.

There have been a plethora of study focusing on the use of hedges. (Rosanti and Jaelani, 2016) examined the use of lexical hedges in spoken language by female and male students. This study focused on the differences between males and females in using lexical hedges and what lexical hedges they use in the debate. They concluded that the number of lexical hedges used by a female is much higher with 160 words compared to 81 words for a male. Thus, there are differences in the tendency to choose lexical hedges in female and male as evidenced by the number of lexical boundaries in female and male correspondents. (Ahmed and Maros, 2017) also researched the use of hedges among students which aimed to investigate how Arab EFL postgraduate students use various types of hedges to give the impression of politeness when they have consulted with supervisors regarding academic projects. In addition, to avoid awkwardness they used hedges as the linguistics politeness markers to lighten the mood. The result of this study showed that students were very familiar with using hedges in every sentence, especially women, and the analysis of the questionnaire showed that students did not fully

understand the pragmatic functions of the hedges they use.

Hedges cannot be used arbitrarily because they affect the content of a conversation. The matter is that the use of hedges within the context of conversations involving children, as we all know children still have limitations in mastering linguistic elements like grammar and linguistics itself and hedges are one among them. Hedges make utterances sound less direct and suggest something uncertain or doubtful, while the youngsters answer something from what they hear and what they see, so that everything happens naturally as it is. However, what if there was a toddler who used hedges in an interview, not only one hedge, but he used hedges repeatedly in one talk. Noah Ritter was five years old when interviewed by Newswatch 16 station until invited to the Ellen Show two years later when he was seven years old. He can fluently apply hedges when answering questions, particularly the hedge “apparently.” This uniqueness undoubtedly interests the researchers to investigate the use of hedges by children.

So far there has been no research focusing on the use of hedges by children. Therefore, to fill this gap, the researchers aimed to examine this phenomenon in depth. This research took Noah Ritter, who can apply the utilization of hedges at his age, as the research subject. In particular, this study aimed to find out how Noah Ritter can use hedges at a very young age and what hedges

he often used. This research also discussed what factors influence his ability to use hedges naturally at his age. In addition, the researcher also explored the relationship between language acquisition in children and children's interactions with their environment so that a child can use hedges like native speakers in general.

## II. Research Method

The researchers used a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research is research on descriptive research and tends to use analysis in the forms of written or oral from observing people's behavior. This type of research provides an overview of the conditions as they are, without giving treatment or manipulation to the variables studied. The research data were focused on the use of hedges in video conversations between young children and adults in comparison to the use of hedges, but more focused on using hedges in young children. The data were obtained from a primary resource taken from a video conversation in the talk show, namely the Ellen Show with guest star Noah Ritter. In its application, the researchers observed conversations in a video to find the hedges. The researchers then calculated what could then be compared to the use of hedges between young children and adults in the video. At last, the researchers then explained or described the meaning of the use of hedges in the video.

## III. Finding and Discussion

After getting data from Noah's conversation with Ellen, which was assisted by using a script so that sentence integrity was maintained, the researcher put the data into a table. Then the researcher separated each word according to how many times it appears. In this study, researcher found that the word "Apparently" appeared 7 times in the conversation followed by the word "Like" 4 times.

**Table 1.** The Occurrences of Hedges in the Video

Hedges	Occurrences
Apparently	7
Just	3
I think	3
Probably	1
Like	4

Table 1 shows the number of hedges used in conversations between Ellen and Noah on the Ellen Talk Show in 2015. The use of hedges is dominated by the word "apparently" (7 words) and followed by "just" (3 words), "I think" (3 words), "Probably" (1 word), and the last "Like" (4 words).

**Table 2.** The Occurrences of Hedges on Ellen and Noah

Hedges	Ellen	Noah
Apparently	3	4
Just	-	3
I think	1	2
Probably	-	1
Like	1	1

Table 2 shows the use of each hedge spoken by Ellen and Noah. But the concern is the use of hedges spoken by Noah who was only 7 years old at the time and this indicates that children can wear hedges in their conversations. The use of hedges is commonly spoken by people to express their opinions without giving affirmation or coercion to the listener. This often happens when we will give a subtle impression and do not impose the will of others and hedges can be used to show respect for the interlocutor and polite in conversation. In previous studies, it was mentioned that the slowest age to receive the term discourse markers between the ages of 9 to 10 years. For instance, (Champaud and Bassano, 1994) state how in France, children aged 8 to 10 process sentences containing discourse markers such as *mais* ('but') and *pourtant* ('nevertheless'). Scott (1984) concluded the development of the use of discourse markers, one of which is hedges in children occurs from the age of 6 to 10 years. In Noah's case where he was 7 years old when he used more than one type of hedges. The hedges he uses most often are the word "apparently" in his conversations. Some of the following analyses show the function and use of hedges on Noah in his interview on Ellen Talk Show:

**(Conversation 1)**

Ellen	:	<i>Apparently</i> earlier this year. I <i>apparently</i> had a little boy on this show named Noah Ritter, <i>apparently</i> . After his
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	:	interview with a local news station went viral, I knew that, I had to meet him. Noah loves dinosaurs, he loves his grandpa, he loves my production assistant, Robby. Most of all he loves saying whatever pops into his head.
Noah	:	<i>Apparently</i> I've never been on live television before, but <i>apparently</i> sometimes I don't watch this-- I don't watch the news, because I'm a kid. And <i>apparently</i> every time-- <i>Apparently</i> grandpa just gives me the remote after he watched the Powerball.

In this conversation, Ellen introduces her guest star by mentioning the word "apparently" as the first word to start the dialogue. There are certain reasons Ellen uses the word such as using it to greet the guest star, Noah and using the Hedges to introduce the audience by keyword that usually used by Noah dubbed "The Apparently Kid". Meanwhile, Noah uses the word "apparently" in a different context. Noah used hedges at the beginning of the sentence to state how he had never appeared on television with non-coercive notation and made the conversation as light as it meant "it seems" between sure and not about it.

(Conversation 2)

Ellen	:	Your grandpa's in the audience. Hi, grandpa. So you're in kindergarten. What are you learning in kindergarten?
Noah	:	<i>I think-- I think</i> they're holding me I don't know how many hours. <i>Probably, like,</i> 11 hours. I don't know, it's like I was in prison for ten days.

In this conversation, there are some hedges spoken by Noah such as "*I think*" and he mentions until two times also there is the word "*Probably*" and "*Like*". In this context, Noah is asked about how the experience he felt while he was in kindergarten and Noah responds with a hedge "*I think*" which means "it seems" and states that he wants to say that something seems to be true, although it is not certain that he said it up to two times. The statement is supported by a subsequent sentence that hints he is not so sure of his opinion that he uses hedges "*Probably*" to guess how long it is and plus hedges "*like*" in which in spoken language is used to state according to what seems to be true or what is likely, based on what you know. This is reinforced by the phrase "*I don't know, it's like I was in prison for ten days.*" Where Noah isn't so sure if he knows the facts or not and he uses hedges to cover his lack of confidence in the truth of the item expressed in the utterance.

(Conversation 3)

Ellen	:	Okay. What if I told you we had, a dinosaur here today? It's a friendly dinosaur too. <i>I think</i> you're gonna like it. Look !.
Noah	:	Wow! I'm pretty sure that's a guy in a costume.

Ellen uses hedges "*I think*" to state that she thinks Noah will love the dinosaur. According to Coates (1996) said that people usually used hedges to express their doubts and felt that her words did not have a strong commitment. In this context, hedges serve as a tool to express the feelings of speakers who are still undecided and try to express them by not imposing their opinions on others.

(Conversation 4)

The man	:	Oh, have you? Look at this guy's eye. Come down here, look.
Noah	:	Oh, my God! - Oh, no. - He <i>just</i> sneezed on me! He <i>just</i> sneezed on me!

In this conversation, Noah uses "just" hedges to describe the moment that just happened and softens a stance or opinion. Noah put hedges to explain an event in a sentence that is not too firm and pushy. Hedges "just" makes what we say less direct. This sentence refers to a dinosaur that suddenly staring at him.

(Conversation 5)

Robby	:	Okay. - All right, here we go!
Noah	:	That was epic! Robby has hairy legs! He's <i>like</i> a monkey !

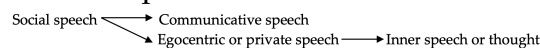
In this conversation, Noah use “like” hedges to describe what was seen on Robby’s body, especially the hairy leg. Noah put hedges to give a parable of the hair on Robby’s leg. He gave a parable of one of the animals that he remembers who had hair on almost all parts of the body, monkey.

From the analysis of the utilization of hedges above, Noah Ritter uses more hedges compared to the adults that having a conversation with him. It is regarding language development in children. Piaget (1973) described the event of speech as follows:

Presocial speec → Egocentric speech → Socialized speech

According to Piaget (1973), children do not automatically become social creatures because children need a process to adapt to the environment and learn to socialize over time, so they need to be trained to socialize by knowing other people's points of view. This will make their language more socialized and communication easier. But on the other hand, Vygotsky (1962) has a different opinion from Piaget. He said that children are born as social beings where they always communicate at a certain point. In addition, he also emphasized that children’s speech consists of two types, namely speech that is directed

at others and speech directed at oneself. He described the process or event of speech as follows:



As we know from these two points of view have supported the point of view of Vygotsky. Children can talk or engage in egocentric talk without considering the interlocutor. So, this speech is more often for self-direction as described by Vygotsky (1962) as cited in (Berk and Winsler, 1995). From the two views on language development, especially about egocentric speech, it is often said that when children ask people children speak only to represent themselves. Based on their age, children are still in the stage of adapting and exploring their environment. Consequently, children can not socialize well because they need to know the social world and become social beings and understand that other people's perspectives can be different. So that, language development in children tends to be influenced by their social environment and who they talk to every time.

Based on the research that we found, Noah uses hedges at his age due to his family environment and was in association with a more mature or speaker environment. As a result, he quickly recognizes his environment and imitates the behavior of adults, like in conversations where there are hedges, but this often shows that Noah has not yet understood hedges and therefore the functions. Hedges

employed by five-year-olds children are hedges for flexibility and sort of application of their daily environment.

#### IV. Conclusion

Hedges may be a component of a discourse marker to express something which uncertain or implies doubt and hedges is a word that sounds less direct, basically hedges are used specifically for adults during a conversation, but Noah Ritter proves that a five-year-old child can apply the utilization of hedges and raises the question of why at that age a toddler can use hedges. Children's language development is influenced by their social environment and therefore the way a toddler interacts with others, Noah Ritter uses hedges like adults, but he has less understanding about hedges and their functions because at that age he uses hedges just for the pliability of what he has. Words and sorts of application of the daily environment. Language development is at the egocentric utterance stage, which suggests that a toddler can only represent himself during a conversation. Noah Ritter uses hedges to represent his feelings as a sort of response to the questions he gets and he can use hedges in lecture people due to environmental factors, especially his family environment and his interactions which are dominated by adults who often use hedges in speaking.

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