

AN ANALYSIS OF FILLERS USAGE IN ACADEMIC PRESENTATION

Ana Stevani, Sudarsono, Iwan Supardi

English Language Education Study Program, FKIP Untan Pontianak

Email: *stevybarajaki@gmail.com*

Abstract

This research aimed to find out what fillers that the students use in delivering their academic presentation, the frequency and the functions of each filler. In English department, the students have already learned English at least six years before they enrolled into the college. However, they still are not fluent while performing English speaking. The data of this research were taken from the corpus of academic presentation of the sixth semester students who were taking the seminar of research design class in Academic Year 2017/2018. The data were sorted out manually from the corpus by separating the fillers from other words. The result showed that there are 12 fillers used by the students in delivering their academic presentation. Of 12 fillers, filler “Ehm” was the most frequent filler used by the students that emerged 689 times. While, the least frequent fillers used were “right” and “how to say” which are only used once respectively. Fillers in this study also showed several functions such as to give a speaker the opportunity to think, to restate or repair what the speaker has said, to initiate the speech, to confirm the conclusion to the opposite speaker, as well as to emphasize the main point of the topic.

Keywords: *Fillers, Academic Presentation*

INTRODUCTION

Communicating to each other is an essential part of everyday life of human being. When communicating, people sometimes produce some speech sounds as well as words, apart from the message that they want to convey, whether in daily talks or well-prepared lectures like academic presentations. A filler is any word or speech sound that enters the main message of the speaker. Based on the researcher's observation during students' academic presentation in Seminar Research Design Class for sixth semester of English language department, Words such as *um, uh, how to say or you know* are fillers frequently uttered by the students. Accordingly, the students were apparently less or not fluent yet in English speaking despite the fact that the students have previously learned English as a foreign language for at least six

years before enrolling into English Language department. Briefly, the students frequently used fillers during their academic presentations delivery showing lack English Speaking fluency. Similar problem was also found in a research that was done by Khojastehrad to Iranian EFL learners. Based on the results he found, he concluded that a non-native speaker of a certain language uses fillers more often than the native (2012).

The usage of fillers has effects towards the value of the speaker in front of her/his listeners, whether negative or positive effect (Duvall, et. Al). The negative effect of fillers occurs when a speaker overuses those words showing that speaker is inexperienced or lack mastery of the materials or topics he or she delivered. It also

makes the audience get difficulty to understand the main message of the topic. On the other hand, fillers help a speaker to recall the words that they want to say next. Thus, it gives time for the speaker to elaborate the next sentences.

This study aims to describe the fillers used in academic presentation of EFL students in English Language Education Study Program of Tanjungpura University in academic year 2017/2018, as well as the frequency of fillers use, and the function of the fillers for students. The study was carried out in Seminar Research Design Class A for sixth semester in PP-APK program.

There are many researches about discourse markers either in the English speaking native countries or in other countries who use English as second or foreign language, but only some that specifically focused on the filler usage which is in fact a part of discourse markers. Moreover, the data resources of this study is derived from the academic presentation delivered by the students of English language education study program in Tanjungpura University. Therefore, the result is just the representation of this area of study. Though, it definitely might be different if the same study is conducted to different participants and different time.

Speaking is a psychological concept turned by a speaker (O'Grady in Siahaan, 2008). It is thought that speaking is a mental process that a speaker puts a psychological concept into some linguistic forms, such as word, phrases, and sentences that is used to convey a message to a listener. Putting the students in a condition to speak sometimes can trigger an anxiety and cause the mental process of speaking hampered. That is why, it can be one of the aspects that can make the speaker use fillers.

Presentation is the ability in using oral language to explore idea, intention, thought, and feeling as a way to make the audiences

understand the message clearly (Kartimi, 2005). In the field of education, one of the ways to apply the speaking skill of the students is by giving an academic presentation in the classroom. Academic presentation is the process of presenting a topic to audiences that is usually connected with education. It is typically a demonstration, lecture, or speech meant to inform or persuade. Giving task to present an academic presentation allows students to use the language skills that they have learned to communicate with others in the classroom. Furthermore, Girard, Pinar and Trapp (2011) state that using oral presentation in their classroom leads to better class interaction and participation, increases the interest in learning, and improves the students' communication and presentation skills.

Fillers are every word, clause, or phrase that the speaker use when he/she wants to convey the main message. According to Erten (2014), fillers are discourse markers that speakers use when they think or hesitate during their speech. Fillers are used by the speaker to fill the time while he or she is elaborating the next topic or sentence. Moreover, Santos, Alarcon, and Pablo (2015) define fillers or also called pausing or hesitation as phenomena that commonly occur as feature of natural speech which appears during the production of expressing words. It can be concluded that it is normal for the speaker to use fillers in speaking. It is supported by the idea from Richards and Schmidt (2012), he states that half of someone's speaking time is filled with pauses.

Fillers can be classified into some forms based on its word construction. It can be simple words, phrases, and clauses. A simple word filler is constructed with only one single word such as but, okay, well, um, yeah, uh, eh, and, see, so and right. Fillers also can be in form of Phrase. A phrasal filler is a group of words without a subject or a verb such as by the way and how to

say. The next is a clausal filler is a group of words that have both subjects and predicates such as I mean and you know.

Fillers can also be classified based on their functions. Castro (2009) describes the functions of discourse markers in textual context. Although there is no specific description about the functions fillers, in this research, the researcher agree that the functions of discourse markers can be used to describe the functions of fillers as well because filler is a part of discourse markers. They can be functioned as: (a) an opening marker, a filler is used by the speaker to begin the speech. (b) an information indicator, a filler is used by the speaker to show the main point of the information. (c) a turn keeper, a filler can also be used by the speaker to keep the turn in a conversation. It can be said that when the speaker needs more time to think about the next words, he prefer to use fillers than to keep silent. (d) a repair marker, a filler is used by the speaker to repair the speech when she/he says the wrong word in the first place.

It is not an easy way to determine why the speakers use fillers because it cannot be seen directly. Based on the report entitled Exploring fillers and their impact by Duvall, Emily et al, there are 3 narrow categorizations of causes. They are divided attention, infrequent words, and nervousness. Divided attention happens when the speakers focus on more than one thing when they are speaking. It can happen because of internal or external factors of the speakers. When the speakers get their attention divided they tend to use more fillers. The research finding conducted by Oomen and Postma (2001) found that the usage of fillers increases drastically when they got their attention divided. Besides divided attention, the use of infrequent words can also stimulate the use of fillers. Infrequent words are words that the speakers use rarely on their daily basis and felt foreign to their mental dictionaries. Dockrell, et al (1998) state

that infrequent words are the main cause of the usage of fillers. The next cause of fillers usage is the combination of divided attention and infrequent word that causes nervousness. It can be happened when the speakers have to deliver an impromptu presentation. Additionally, according to Goldwater et all (2010) as cited in Duvall, Emily et al, using infrequent words and speaking too fast can increase the usage of fillers.

METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive method to explain what fillers that the students use while delivering their academic presentation, how is their frequency and the functions of each filler. According to Kothari (2004), descriptive researches are those researches which focus on describing the characteristics of a particular individual or a group.

Corpus

Corpus is a collection of written or spoken words that can be one of the data resources. Corpus is representative sample of a particular type of naturally occurring language that is used as a standard reference to measure a language (Baker, 2006). The present research collected the data from the specialized corpus that was recorded from the students' academic presentation who were studying at sixth semester class A PPAPK Academic Year 2017/2018 in English Language Education Study Program, Tanjungpura University Pontianak. The total number of the students in Class A PPAPK at the sixth semester that became the data resources is 10 students.

The first step that was done by the researcher was to collect the data by recording the academic presentation of the students in their second session of the academic presentation. The second sessions were lasted approximately 12 minutes for each presentation. The tool of data

collection used was a video recorder. After recording the students' academic presentation, the researcher built the corpus by transcribing the spoken corpus. The transcripts of the academic presentation of the students was done manually by the researcher. In this step, all of the words uttered by the speaker were transcribed. All of the transcripts were counted as one corpus.

Sorting Out the Data

Since not all words in a corpus are the data, the researcher needs to sort them out from the corpus. Since there were 4 students in each transcription, one speaker and three students discussant, they are named S1, S2, S3 (Speaker 1, Speaker 2, Speaker 3) for the speaker in each transcription and D1a, D1b, D1c (Discussant 1, discussant 2, discussant 3) for the three discussant in each transcription.

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and compiling the data obtained from field notes, recording, and other materials, so it can be understood easily and its findings can inform others. According to Singh (2006), analysis of data means studying the tabulated material in order to determine inherent facts or meanings.

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. The steps that were applied are: (1) Identifying the fillers out of the corpus. (2) Classifying the fillers in a table based on their

forms, they are in the form of simple words, phrases, or clauses and also the functions of the same-type fillers by using the theory of textual functions of discourse markers by Castro as the reference and it was explained in form of qualitative description. (3) Computing the emergence of each filler word was counted. The same-type fillers were counted manually by the researcher. (4) The result of this was shown in form of table with the frequency of fillers and their percentage. The conclusion were taken from the data that has been analyzed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings derived from the transcription of the recorded corpus by 10 students who were doing the academic presentation in Seminar Research Design class A in PP-APK program in Tanjungpura University and were selected as the data resources. The result from the data analysis showed that there were 12 fillers used by the students while delivering their speech. They are ehm, okay, actually, so, and, and then, I mean, something like, well, then, right, and how to say. Filler ehm become the most frequently used filler that emerged 689 times and the least frequently was filler right and how to say that emerged only once for each. Table 1 below shows those 12 fillers with their frequency and percentage.

Table 1: The Fillers

No	Fillers	The Frequency (number)	Percentage (%)
1	Ehm	689	79.19
2	Okay	61	7.01
3	Actually	35	4.02
4	So	26	2.98
5	And	20	2.29
6	And then	11	1.26
7	I mean	10	1.14

8	Something like	9	1.03
9	Well	5	0.57
10	Then	2	0.22
11	Right	1	0.11
12	How to say	1	0.11
	Total	870	100

Fillers that occurred in speech can be classified based on their word construction into simple words, phrases, and clauses. There were 8 fillers in form of simple words. A filler can be categorized as simple word filler if it only consists of single word. They are *ehm*, *okay*, *actually*, *so*, *and*, *well*, *then*, and *right*. Among those fillers, *ehm* is the most frequently used and *right* is the least frequently used filler. Each of them is exemplified in (1) until (8) respectively.

- (1)D1b: *ehm* why you *ehm* why you interest in using this ted animation videos because there is many videos, right? So what what makes different from the other videos? (*Transcription 1*)
- (2)D6a: *Okay*...ehm I have some suggestions and question for you. (*Transcription 6*)
- (3)S1: ehm *actually* ehm *actually* ehm the publisher is ehm the New York, the one that New York, Routledge is *actually* the mistakes from the previous ehmm references that I should be... (*Transcription 1*)
- (4)S3: okay... ehm... *so*... I would like to answer the question... *so* ehm here ehm... the process ehm the process I take the data. (*Transcription 3*)
- (5)D8a: Ehm..... *and*... your research question, there is two research questions right? But in your research purposes you just put one. (*Transcription 8*)
- (6)S10: *Well*, ehm I think the measurement is ehm the action movies can affect

the students learning process in class. (*Transcription 10*)

- (7)D5b: ehm *then*... ... specific vocabulary to develop your research in your proposal? (*Transcription 5*)

- (8)D5a: *Right*, thank you very much for the time. (*Transcription 5*)

Moreover, there were 3 fillers in the form of phrases. It can be classified into a phrasal filler if it is a group of words without a subject and a verb. In this form, *and then* is the most frequently used and *how to say* is the least frequently used. The examples of those fillers in sentence are shown below.

- (9)D8c: *And then* your mechanic. You have ehm so bad mechanic, *and then* you have numeral, *and then* numeral is bad too, and you use too much punctuation. (*Transcription 8*)
- (10) S7: I used the next step is trying to teach the students the structure, it *something like* verb, if I teach the students speaking procedure text first I should teach the students *something like* ehm the steps you can say first, second, and the finish, and the last or *something like* that. (*Transcription 7*)
- (11) S1: It's one of my ehm *how to say* ehm it is easier for me to ehm listen to do listening section than like writing or reading. (*Transcription 1*)

The last is in the form of clause, *I mean* is the only one filler found as shown in (12).

- (12) D4b: ***I mean, I mean*** ehm... why don't you put them in your references sources? (***Transcription 4***)

The total number of each form are shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: The Forms of Fillers

No	Form of Filler	Frequency	
		(Number)	(%)
1	Simple Word	839	96,43
2	Phrases	21	2, 41
3	Clauses	10	1, 14
Total		870	100

Besides based on the word constructions, fillers also can be classified based on their functions. First, they can be functioned to begin the speech (opening markers), it is shown when the speaker use filler to initiate the conversation. There are 4 fillers, *okay, right, well* and *so*, functioned as opening frame markers as shown in the examples below.

- (13) S7: ***Okay*** ehm... the content validity is the the sentence in content validity is my mistakes. (***Transcription 7***)
- (14) D5a: ***Right***, thank you very much for the time. (***Transcription 5***)
- (15) S10: ***Well***, ehm I think the measurement is ehm the action movies can affect the students learning process in class. (***Transcription 10***)
- (16) S3: okay... ehm... ***so***... I would like to answer the question... so ehm here ehm... the process ehm the process I take the data. (***Transcription 3***)

Second, to show the main point of the information (information indicators). The one and only filler in this study that showed this function was I mean where it was used 10 times. The example of the usage of this filler is shown in (17) below.

- (17) D4b: ***I mean, I mean*** ehm... why don't you put them in your references sources? (***Transcription 4***)

Third, to keep the turn in a conversation (turn keepers). In other words, it can be said that it functioned to give the time to the speaker to think about the next word. There were 7 fillers that occurred 767 times showed this functions such as *ehm, how to say, something like, and, then, and then, and actually*. They are exemplified respectively below.

- (18) S1: And also ***ehm ehm*** as I told you ***ehm*** as I told you before that ***ehm*** the experience that I told you before that most of ***ehm*** my friends in the first semester students ***ehm*** they cannot really ***ehm*** they lack of understanding the listening section. (***Transcription 1***)
- (19) S1: ehm ***actually*** ehm ***actually*** ehm the publisher is ehm the New York, the one that New York, Routledge is ***actually*** the mistakes from the previous ehmm references that I should be... (***Transcription 1***)
- (20) D8a: Ehm..... ***and***... your research question, there is two research questions right? But in your

- research purposes you just put one. (*Transcription 8*)
- (21) S7: I used the next step is trying to teach the students the structure, it something like verb, if I teach the students speaking procedure text first I should teach the students something like ehm the steps you can say first, second, and the finish, and the last or something like that. (*Transcription 7*)
- (22) D8c: And then your mechanic. You have ehm so bad mechanic, and then you have numeral, and then numeral is bad too, and you use too much punctuation. (*Transcription 8*)
- (23) D5b: ehm then... .. specific vocabulary to develop your research in your proposal? (*Transcription 5*)
- (24) S1: It's one of my ehm how to say ehm it is easier for me to ehm listen to do listening section than like writing or reading. (*Transcription 1*)

There are certain situation that a certain word cannot be classified as a filler as shown in the following examples.

- (25) D8a: Ehm..... and... your research question, there is two research questions right? But in your research purposes you just put one. (*Transcription 8*)
- (26) D8c: I think you must give the example of the pre-test and posttest, in your, you don't, in your appendix you don't give the pretest and the post test. (*Transcription 8*)

Word and in (25) can be classified as a filler when the speaker use and followed by long pause. In other hand, it cannot be classified as a filler, as in (26), when it functioned as a conjunction in a sentence.

The last is to repair the speech (repair markers) when she/he says the wrong word in the first place. They can be seen respectively as follow.

- (27) S1: in here you have ehm you put nation... (*Transcription 1*)
- (28) S2: I will give additional time for for her ehm for them that have ehm that they are not have ehm low in confident. (*Transcription 2*)
- (29) S10: I think ehm the problem of the speaking on my research is ehm... I mean there are ehm a lot of ways to improve ehm speaking skill like ehm storytelling and and conversation. (*Transcription 10*)

In the example above, it can be seen that the speaker already said “you have” but after that she used filler *ehm* and repaired the word with “you put.” The similar things happened in (28), the speaker already said “for her” before she repaired it with “for them” and said “that have” after that she repaired with “they are not have”. In (29), the speaker already stated about the problem in the first place but she used filler *ehm* followed by I mean and then change the statement she said.

DISCUSSION

Erten (2014) said, this kind of study would not result in the same way if it was done with different participants in different times because there are many factors that can affect the usage of the fillers. That is why the result of this study cannot be the general reference to conclude that all of the students in English Language Department use a certain filler. Regarding to the research findings, there are 12 fillers that are found in this study. Those fillers are used by the student while they were delivering their academic presentation.

Considering even the native speaker still use the fillers in their unprepared talk, using certain fillers is highly natural to non-natives speaker

like students in English language education study program in Tanjungpura University because they are not the natives speaker of English. As supported by Khojastehrad (2012), it is almost impossible to find out the speaker who did not use any filler at all while speaking even among the native speakers. It is a natural things happened to speakers because they sometimes need time to think or feel unsure about the words they want to say. The research findings found in Khojastehrad (2012) have the similarity with this study in term of the most frequently used filler, that is filler ehm although the number of the emergence was different.

This study classified the filler into some forms. They are simple words, phrases, and clauses. In the form of simple words, ehm is the most frequently used and right was the least frequently used. In the form of phrases, and then as the most frequently used and how to say was the least frequently used. And the last was in the form of clauses, I mean was the only one filler occurred.

There are four functions found in this study. It can be used as opening markers when it is initiated the speech, as information indicators to emphasize the main point of the topic, as turn keepers to give the speaker time to think about the next word. And as repair markers to repair the wrong word uttered in the first place. In this study, the most frequently functions showed by the fillers was as a turn keeper. It is also found in a study by Clark and Tree (2002) who said that speakers use the fillers in turn to show that they are searching for words, are deciding what to say next, want to keep the floor.

There are certain situation that the exact word cannot be classified as a filler. Word and can be classified as a filler when the speaker use and followed by long pause. However, it cannot be classified as a filler when it functioned as a conjunction in a sentence. This similar fact of the

functions of and as a conjunction and a filler is also found in a study by Windy et al. (2016).

Although some experts said that the usage of fillers is normal for the speaker, for example, as Kormos and Dénes (2004) said that there are certain situations in which native speakers frequently hesitate, it will make the listener hard to get the main point if the speaker uses too many fillers in one time. It is supported by the report by Duvall, Emily et al concluded that the most effective speech occurs when filler words are used moderately.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

There were 12 fillers that are found in this study. They are ehm, okay, actually, so, and, and then, I mean, something like, well, then, right, how to say. From 12 fillers, filler ehm is the most frequently used filler by the students in this study with emergence 689 times. And the least frequently fillers are right and how to say that just emerged once. Fillers can be classified into some forms just by looking at the word constructions, they are simple words, phrase, and clause. Fillers in this study showed several functions such as to give the speaker the opportunity to think, to restate or repair what the speaker has said, to initiate the speech, and to emphasize the main point of the topic. The most frequently function showed in this study is as turn keepers to hold the conversation or to give the speaker time to think about the next topic. The result of this study is only as the representative of this class because different places and many aspects can affect and may give the different result.

Suggestion

After all of the process of data analysis, the researcher proposes the suggestion for the students, lecturer, and further researcher regarding the filler usage. First, in delivering speaking, the students need to realize the importance of fillers' usage. Although it is

normal to use fillers to show the natural speaking but it can make the opposite speaker hard to get the point if the fillers are used too often. Second, in teaching and learning process, this study can be the insight for the lecturers that they need to explain about the importance of fillers' usage especially in speaking class. The aspects such as kinds of filler, the functions and how to control the usage. Third, this study can be used for further researchers who want to explore more aspects about fillers like the specific reason why the students use a certain filler especially in the context of university students.

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