

Students' Tendency in Using Fillers in Situations of Randomly Appointed to Answer Oral Questions

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Abstract. For EFL learners, fillers can easily be found in conversation, especially in a spontaneous situation. Mostly, EFL learners found difficulty in expressing their idea by words, so they produced a sound such as “ehm”, or repeated their words and sometimes containing pauses which are called fillers. Fillers can indicate that the interlocutor is not competent, but on the other hand, they can be used as a strategy to create conversation. Although fillers are categorized as strategic competence, they have several functions to make conversation smooth; overproducing will make it challenging for the interlocutor to catch the meaning. The research focuses on fillers and parts produced by an English class of senior high school students in Semarang. Research in senior high school is necessary because high school is the final level in the nine years of compulsory education launched in Indonesia. So, the output of high school graduates will represent the majority of the ability of Indonesian English skills. Researchers took the data in the classroom by pointing students randomly to answer some questions to investigate the use of fillers and to analyze their functions. The data was collected by using audio recording and transcribing. This research belongs to a descriptive qualitative study. Rose's (1998) theory is used in this study to reveal the types of fillers. To analyze the fillers function that students used, researchers will use the theory from Stenstrom (1994). The expected result of this research is that this can be an analytical material for educators in Indonesia to improve students' abilities, especially in conversation.

Keywords: fillers, strategic competence, English speaking skills.

1 Introduction

People in Indonesia have difficulty using English since it is considered a Foreign Language. Students in Indonesia mostly use their mother language like the Javanese language, Sundanese language, Minangkabau language, etc. depending on their geographical factors. In school or sometimes on informal occasions, they use Bahasa Indonesia which means English has little time to be used in their daily life. The effect of this situation makes it hard to grow their

competence in mastering the language. The result is in conversation they are facing problems in sharing their ideas. Students usually make mistakes and errors and end up using fillers.

In daily conversation, speakers do not have a lot of time to think since the event is happening in real-time. So speakers have no time to prepare what they want to say. It can be said that conversation mostly happens on random topics, and both speaker and interlocutors have no preparation for some topic or are in the position of doing a conversation spontaneously. So the communication did not run well. To buy time, sometimes speakers produce or say “ehm”, “ehh”, “well”, and “you know” which are called fillers. One of the reasons students use fillers is because of the lack of vocabulary, especially for English foreign learners. Although students are already learning English, the use of fillers can not be avoided. It is normal to use fillers but it becomes annoying if speakers overuse them.

In expressing the idea, fillers can be erased since it does not contain the main information. Without fillers, the purpose of communication and the main information still can be delivered. Although fillers do not contain the main information, their functions can be useful as strategic competence. (Fitrianti, 2021) [1] added that the position of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesian speakers sometimes creates problems in communication, for example, lexical problems. To make conversations run smoothly and conducive, sometimes they attempt to find strategies. In some situations, the speaker usually faces a problem with their fluency but still needs the floor to express their idea. It makes them have to create a delay to give a response for the audience to wait until the speaker finds the correct sentence or words. The filler can be used as that signal (Clark, 2002) [2].

In learning a language, there are some competencies that people need to master to use language appropriately. (Canale, 1980) [3] stated that communicative competence includes both implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar and language use. (Herdiawan, 2018) [4] stated that communicative competence is the basic principle in the implementation of English pedagogy. (Celce-Murcia, 2007) [5] explains that there are six aspects of communicative competence. Those are linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, formulaic competence, and discourse competence. The purpose of learning a language should be mastering communicative competence or the learner will end up facing problems like delaying or stopping in the middle of the conversation so often. People will delay by giving words with no meaning to indicate that they are still collecting thoughts and want to keep their turn in the conversation, those words can be described as fillers.

According to the experts, fillers as a part of strategies in conversation have various opinions. The purpose of learning a language is to be able to communicate. Indonesian students at EFL have to adapt to the language they never used in daily life. Mostly they are using fillers in communication although they never know what fillers are and what its functions. (Navratilova, 2015) [6] explain that fillers can be used as a form of interruption. For example, when somebody explains, the interlocutors sometimes use words such as um, er, uh, etc. (Kurwanto, 2011) [7] in his opinion argues that the function of fillers is to fill the gap between conversation as a signal of hesitation and to make interlocutors wait for the speaker to think about what the speaker wants to say. (Kharismawan, 2017) [8] added that fillers can be a way to improve speaker interaction with the interlocutor. (Dörnyei, 1997) [9] agree that fillers are a useful strategy for holding the floor when they think or hesitate during a speech.

On the other hand, some researchers found that there are some negative impacts of using fillers. (Andriani, 2018) [10] argues that fillers do not have any purpose. As similar with (Andriani, 2018) [10], (Dlugan, 2011) [11] also stated that fillers bring negativity to communication. He stated that Fillers can reduce our credibility and indicate that we lack preparation. (Lomotey, 2021) [12] added that if fillers are overused, they can attract negativity since it reduces speaker fluency.

From the explanation above I can conclude that fillers are optional to be used. It can be used as a strategy for conversation, and it also can be used as an indicator that the speaker is facing problems in communicating especially when the speaker uses fillers too much. As a senior high school student who learns about English, students should be able to master communicative competence as the output. In this research, We would focus on students' tendency in using fillers in spontaneous communication.

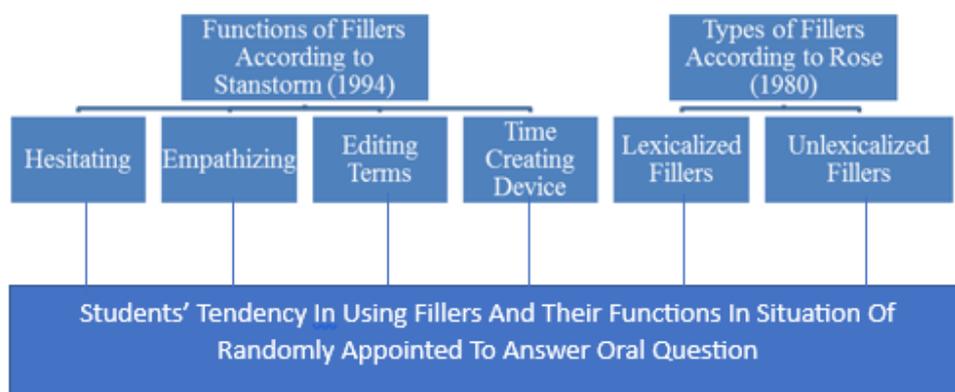


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Students' Tendency in Using Fillers and Their Functions in Situation of Randomly Appointed to Answer Oral Question

In advance, (Rose, 1998) [13] categorized fillers into two, lexicalized and unlexicalized. Lexicalized fillers are fillers that are still categorized as words of short sentences such as; well, you know, etc. While unlexicalized fillers are categorized as non-words, for example, ehm, oh, ah, and so on. (Clark, 2002) [14] revealed that fillers “uh” or “um” indicate that the speaker needs time for conversation. The function is to indicate that they are looking for the correct words or deciding what to say. (Firiady, 2019) [15] found that fillers “uh” or “um” have a function to create attention. It means that the function of fillers is flexible depending on the context. Therefore, the following are the research problems of this study which are related to the use of fillers for students. the focus of this research is related to the research problems we mentioned below:

- 1) What kind of fillers do students use in the classroom conversation?
- 2) What is the function of fillers that students mention in spontaneous conversation?

Based on the function that researchers mentioned above and the difficulty that students have in doing conversations, those problems are necessary to be revealed since there is no intention in Indonesian education, especially in English class to give focus on learning fillers.

2 Methodology

The research design applied was descriptive and qualitative to describe the fillers produced by students in one of the senior high schools in Semarang. We decided to use qualitative research because it has a better advantage in finding a deeper understanding of particular issues [16] (Creswell, 2009). We attempt to describe the usage of fillers among students in one of the senior high schools in Semarang who join the English conversation club and their role will be the participants.

2.1 Subject of the study

The subject of this study is students in one of the senior high schools in Semarang, while the object of the study is students' tendency in using fillers randomly appointed to answer oral questions. There are some reasons why we choose students in one of the senior high schools in Semarang. First, students learning English in class as EFL surely linear with our research in researching what kind of filler students use in English communication. Second, since students in high school have an English classroom, it can be a good chance to know their abilities since the only place EFL in Indonesia uses English is only at school. Through that condition, it is interesting to analyze the output of their language mastery since the purpose of learning English is to master communicative competence and one of them is strategic competence. In this research, we focused on the usage of fillers which were used by students in senior high school.

In describing the functions of fillers, we used the theory from [17] (Stenstrom, 1994) that mentioned the functions of fillers are hesitating, empathizing, editing terms, and time-creating devices. To analyze the types of fillers, we used [18] (Rose's, 1980) theory and in advance, we have used Stenstrom's (1994) theory in analyzing its functions. According to Rose (1998), fillers are divided into two types. The first is lexicalized fillers which refer to the form of short phrases. For example; You know, if you know what I mean, such as, etc. and the second one is unlexicalized fillers which are not categorized as words, for example; hmm, err, oh, huh, etc.

2.2 Data Collection

In this study, researchers used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from students' responses in answering the teacher's questions. From these responses, it would be revealed what kind of fillers did students use and how they used them. To create a deeper understanding, the data were supported by secondary data. The secondary data was taken from the interview with the teacher about students' performance in using English.

2.3 Procedure in Collecting the Data

The data collected in this research was documentation and interview. Researchers used recorded audio of students' conversations in English class which will be transcribed. In doing documentation, the teacher was teaching as usual and sometimes gave questions randomly to students and did conversations with some topics to check the use of fillers that they produce.

After the data was collected, we focused on transcribing the utterance which shows the filler and analyzing its functions. The secondary data was by an open ended interview with the teacher to analyze students' performance which was also transcribed.

3 Finding and discussion

The following are the results of the students' responses in answering the teacher's question. The situation in the class was teaching a learning activity like usual. and on some occasions, the teacher asked some questions without giving students preparation to create a spontaneous situation.

a. Primary data

Finding 1

Student was not sure if his answer was correct or not, so he used ehm between utterances to answer. The teacher asked the student about his hobby, but he answered in Indonesian language and then the teacher gave the command to answer her question in English.

Teacher : What is your hobby?

Student : Makan.

Teacher : You should answer in English, kamu harus menjawab ke Bahasa Inggris, Bahasa Inggrisnya makan apa ?

(What is makan in English?)

Students : ehm . . . Eating.

In this situation, the student used unlexicalized fillers because she was hesitant in answering the question.

Finding 2

Student was not sure how to answer correctly.

Teacher : What is your hobby?

Students : Singing

Teacher : Jawabnya dengan kalimat yang lengkap to (You should answer with full sentence)

Student : ehm . . . my hobby is singing.

The student hesitated in answering the question because she was not sure how to answer in full sentences. Here unlexicalized fillers appear.

Finding 3

Student was not sure of her answer, so he needed time to think.

Teacher : What is your hobby?

Student : ehm . . . I do not know.

The function of unlexicalized filler in this situation was hesitating because the student felt hesitant in answering the question.

Finding 4

The student used unlexicalized fillers to edit terms because she was aware that she made a mistake.

Teacher : How about you mbak Berlin?

Student : Reading, Ehh. . . my hobby is reading books.

Finding 5

Student needed time to find the correct word

Teacher : Mas, what is your hobby?

Student : olahraga, ehm . . . doing sport.

Finding 6

The student hesitated to create a sentence.

Teacher : Kalo saya memberi mbak Ajwa permen Bahasa Inggrisnya apa (What is the English sentence of I give Ajwa a candy)

Student : I give, ehm. . . Ajwa a candy.

Finding 7

The student did not know the English word of the sentence that he wanted to utter.

Teacher : What is the difference between he and his?

Students : Ehm. . . kalau he itu orangnya kalau his itu miliknya.

Finding 8

The teacher gave Students a question, and whoever wanted to answer had a chance to answer. In this situation, a student wanted to show that she could answer but still did not know how to arrange the sentence. So she used filler to get the teacher's attention that she wanted to answer but needed more time.

Teacher : sekarang apa bahasa inggrisnya kelas kita bersih? (what is the English of our class is clean?)

Student : Ehm. . . our class is clean.

In the process of collecting the data, the teacher asked all of the students randomly, but most students did not respond because they were too shy to speak and had no knowledge of some topics. In other moments, we also found that students answer the teacher's questions using the Javanese language. We conclude that students in a senior high school which we researched before are categorized as having low proficiency in English.

1. Teacher : Do you still remember he, she and it?
Students : (Silent)
2. Teacher asked about the pronoun.
Teacher : I change into?
Students : (Silent)
3. Teacher : If the subject is doer/performer atau pelaku, then the object is orang yang dikenai ?
Students : (Silent)
4. Teacher : What are the pronouns of cat?
Students : (Silent)
5. Teacher : Can you mention the name of the fruit which I did not mention yet?
Students : (Silent)
6. Teacher : Is that right? His, her, himself?
Students : (Silent)
7. Teacher : What is the correct answer? She . . . herself
Students : (Silent)
8. Teacher : In here, her as an . . . ?
Students : (Silent)
9. Teacher : You know the difference between subject and object right?
Students : Silent

Table 1. The findings of Students' Tendency in Using Fillers and Their Functions in Situation of Randomly Appointed to Answer Oral Question

Fillers	Function	Types of Fillers
1. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
2. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
3. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
4. ehh	Editing term	Unlexicalized Fillers
5. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
6. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
7. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating	Unlexicalized Fillers
8. <u>ehm</u>	Hesitating and looking for the interlocutor's attention	Unlexicalized Fillers

From the findings above, although there are two types of fillers, students only use unlexicalized fillers. Although there are some functions of fillers, most students only used them for hesitation.

b. Secondary data

Researchers interviewed a teacher who taught the lesson at the research place. Since the teacher is also considering that the teacher is currently studying postgraduate studies and is also studying discourse analysis and fillers, she understands the purpose of the research so that the research goes right on target.

The teacher agrees that students had a lack of knowledge in using fillers. That's the reason why students only used it as hesitating. Their confidence in using English was also very weak. Although they used it, they did not know that those were fillers. It was different when the teacher used the full Javanese language. Students answered the question confidently and mostly they did not use fillers. Students also used unlexicalized fillers because they did not know anything about lexicalized fillers. Moreover, lexicalized fillers were not familiar to them. She agrees that students need to learn about fillers to create smooth conversations. She argued that using monotonous fillers makes conversation a little bit uncomfortable, but it's better than only getting silent responses from students. By knowing that students are using unlexicalized fillers, the teacher knew that students try to process something or need time. But, when the response is silent, most teachers have no idea if students are giving attention or not.

4 Discussion

According to the finding, the students' tendency in using filler is monotone. Although according to (Rose, 1998) [13] there are two types of fillers, lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers, we only found students only using unlexicalized fillers. There are some reasons why the students mostly use "ehm" as the fillers. First, it is because its function is to hesitate. Students here have difficulty understanding, answering, and finding the correct vocabulary in answer to what the teacher asks. Because of those factors, unlexicalized fillers "ehm" appear. Second, "ehm" is the simple filler that can be produced. It is also supported by (Stevani, 2018) [18] who stated that

“ehm” is the most frequently used since it is the simple one. The reason students use this type of filler frequently may be because they aren't aware of another filler.

Based on the finding, we cannot find any lexical fillers since students lack English proficiency. It is related to (Fitrianti, 2021) [1] who found that students in master programs tend to use lexical fillers. In advance, students with master's degrees have variations in using fillers. They can use all of the functions of fillers correctly. (Stenström, 1994) [17] mentions five functions of fillers, those are hesitation, empathizer, mitigation, time-creating, devices, and editing terms. While students in senior high school only use it as hesitating while sometimes using it as an editing term which is in contrast with students use in master's degree. The result of this research is compared to research from [1] (Fitrianti, 2021) we can conclude that students with more proficiency produced more fillers, and in detail, the more students have a high level of proficiency, they used more lexical fillers which is in linear with (Andriani, 2018) [10]. (Fatimah, 2017) [19] also found that between lecturer and students, the lecturer has more tendency in using lexicalized fillers while students have more tendency in using unlexicalized fillers which is this fact also supports the assumption above.

5 Recommendation

Applying fillers in EFL in senior high school is difficult since students are still passive in communication. Although the teacher encourages them to speak, they remain silent which is also the difficulty in doing this research. A built understanding of using fillers can be added in some situations to create knowledge on how and when to use fillers. By giving knowledge of fillers, students will understand that fillers can make them smoother in conversation, but if it is not used properly it can create a negative perception of the interlocutor.

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