



The Use of Fillers in Spoken Discourse Video by Students at English Language Education Study Program of State University of Gorontalo

(Penggunaan Filler dalam Video Wacana Lisan oleh Mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Negeri Gorontalo)

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Abstract

This study analyzes the Use of fillers in spoken discourse videos by students of the English Language Education Study Program at Gorontalo State University (UNG). The purpose is to identify the types of fillers used and the factors that influence their Use. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with data collected through analysis of students' video assignments, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the most frequently used fillers were unlexicalized (e.g., "um", "uh"), compared to lexicalized fillers (e.g., "so", "okay"). The main factors that influence the Use of fillers in spoken discourse video assignments are Inadequate preparation time, Divided attention, Filling the Void with Fillers, and Emphasis on Speaking. This study also revealed that fillers can be used in constructing sentences and maintaining fluency in communication even though they are considered to interfere with fluency. Pedagogical implications include teaching communication strategies to improve fluency and reducing excessive Use of fillers through speaking preparation and managing nervousness.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan kata-kata pengisi dalam video wacana lisan oleh mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Negeri Gorontalo (UNG). Tujuannya adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis kata-kata pengisi yang digunakan dan faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi penggunaannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui analisis tugas video mahasiswa, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata-kata pengisi yang paling sering digunakan adalah kata-kata yang tidak terleksikalisasi (misalnya, "um", "uh"), dibandingkan dengan kata-kata yang terleksikalisasi (misalnya, "so", "okay"). Faktor-faktor utama yang memengaruhi penggunaan kata-kata pengisi dalam tugas video wacana lisan adalah waktu persiapan yang tidak memadai, perhatian yang terbagi, mengisi kekosongan dengan kata-kata pengisi, dan penekanan pada berbicara. Penelitian ini juga mengungkapkan bahwa kata-kata pengisi dapat digunakan dalam menyusun kalimat dan menjaga kelancaran dalam berkomunikasi meskipun dianggap mengganggu kelancaran. Implikasi pedagogis meliputi pengajaran strategi komunikasi untuk meningkatkan kelancaran dan mengurangi penggunaan kata-kata pengisi yang berlebihan melalui persiapan berbicara dan mengelola kegugupan.

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1. PENDAHULUAN

Fillers are discourse markers frequently used in spoken communication to fill pauses or indicate hesitation, allowing speakers to organize their thoughts. Common examples include "uh," "umm," "well," and "you know" (Gandeza, 2023; Baalen, 2001). These elements, while not altering the meaning of an utterance, serve as tools to maintain conversational flow and prevent communication breakdowns (Yule, 2022). Clark and Tree (2002) argue that fillers also serve communication functions, supporting speakers in structuring their sentences without contributing to the core message. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, fillers are significant indicators of fluency and disfluency, reflecting their ability to navigate spontaneous speech (Abdullah & Mohammed, 2023).

Studies have explored the types and causes of fillers among EFL learners, particularly in Indonesia, where English is a foreign language predominantly used in academic settings. Research highlights two types of fillers: lexicalized (e.g., "you know") and unlexicalized (e.g., "uh"), with the latter being more frequent in formal contexts due to nervousness, word retrieval issues, or reflexive habits (Ghasemi & Mozaheb, 2021). For instance, 6th-semester students at Muhammadiyah University Luwuk were found to use more lexicalized fillers than their 4th-semester counterparts (Arrasul et al., 2024).

This phenomenon has practical implications for EFL education, particularly in enhancing speaking fluency and confidence among learners. Research from Universitas Negeri Gorontalo focuses on analyzing filler usage in spoken discourse video assignments by third-semester students. This study aims to identify filler types and the factors influencing their use, offering insights for educators to guide students in minimizing overuse or misuse of fillers. By addressing these challenges, students can improve their speaking skills, viewing fillers not as obstacles but as strategies for effective communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Nature of Fillers

Fillers are a common linguistic phenomenon in various languages, often used to maintain the flow of conversation or indicate hesitation during speech. Baalen (2001) defines fillers as words or sounds like "uh," "umm," "like," and "you know," which can be inserted or omitted from speech without altering its meaning. Although Beeching et al. (2023) argue that fillers are insignificant in terms of meaning, they still play a role in natural and informal communication. Erten (2014) highlights that fillers function as discourse markers, allowing speakers to fill pauses while organizing their thoughts or transitioning between topics.

Fillers serve various purposes depending on the context, functioning as tools to manage hesitations and bridge communication gaps. Clark and Tree (2002) emphasize that fillers add extra meaning by supporting understanding between speakers and listeners. They are particularly common in spontaneous speech, helping speakers maintain conversational flow and providing time to think. While often perceived as insignificant or redundant, fillers contribute to informal communication by aiding comprehension and expressing subtle nuances in speech.

2.2 Types of Fillers

Fillers in spoken communication are broadly classified into two types: silent pauses and filled pauses, each serving distinct purposes. Silent pauses, as defined by Brown and Yule (1983), are moments of silence used by speakers to strategize and organize their speech. These pauses can occur before or during an utterance and are categorized into short, normal, and unusually long pauses (Zilola, 2022). They often appear at grammatical or discourse boundaries, helping both speakers and listeners process information effectively. Cecot (2001) highlights that silent pauses can indicate transitions in conversation, allowing another speaker to take their turn.

Silent pauses play a critical role in spoken communication by offering a structured method for organizing thoughts and enabling reflective listening. According to Wehrle et al. (2023), silent pauses are particularly significant in spontaneous dialogue, where they highlight key discourse elements. They can also

result from cognitive challenges, speech disorders, or sociolinguistic factors. In spontaneous speech, silent pauses substitute for punctuation in written language, marking tone unit boundaries and aiding clarity in communication.

Filled pauses, meanwhile, are verbal expressions or sounds used to fill gaps during speech. Van Craeynest et al. (2024) suggest that filled pauses are consciously included in speech plans to indicate delays while the speaker organizes their thoughts. According to Pistono and Hartsuiker (2021), filled pauses like "uh" and "um" signal varying levels of hesitation and occur during the initial stages of lexical access. These pauses can be further divided into unlexicalized pauses, such as "uh" or "hmm," which are non-words signaling hesitation, and lexicalized pauses, such as "you know" or "I mean," which are actual words or phrases used to maintain control of the conversation (Rose, 1998; Baalen, 2001).

Both silent and filled pauses are integral to effective spoken communication, as they assist speakers in managing the flow of conversation while organizing their thoughts. Silent pauses contribute to thoughtful and structured dialogue, while filled pauses help maintain engagement and signal the speaker's intent to continue speaking. Together, these pauses support the dynamic nature of spoken language and facilitate mutual understanding between speakers and listeners, as emphasized by Stenström (1994) and Tree (1995). Understanding the functions and types of pauses provides valuable insights into the cognitive and linguistic processes underlying human communication.

2.3 The Factors Influence Fillers

Oomen and Postma (2001) identified three key factors contributing to the use of filler words: divided attention, infrequent words, and nervousness. Divided attention occurs when speakers are distracted by external stimuli or simultaneously focus on multiple tasks, leading to lapses in fluency and the insertion of filler words. For instance, distractions such as audience behavior or unforeseen events can divert attention from the speech, prompting non-fluent pauses. Their research underscores that divided attention significantly heightens verbal disfluency in task-based activities. Infrequent words, on the other hand, pertain to unfamiliar vocabulary outside a speaker's daily lexicon. The mental effort required to retrieve such words often results in pauses or the use of fillers like "um" as the brain struggles to process and articulate them.

Nervousness also amplifies the occurrence of filler words, often intertwined with divided attention and infrequent word use. According to studies like those by Goldwater et al. (2010), nervousness can lead to rapid speech and reliance on less familiar vocabulary, further increasing verbal disfluency. When nervous, speakers may focus excessively on listeners' reactions, causing them to insert filler words as they try to regain composure. Thus, the combination of these three factors—divided attention, infrequent words, and nervousness—significantly influences speech fluency, making the use of fillers a common linguistic phenomenon.

2.4 Fillers in Spoken Discourse

Younes et al. (2023) argue that fillers in spoken discourse serve broader pragmatic functions compared to their use in written discourse. Spoken discourse, being spontaneous and less planned, often includes elements like "hmmm," "okay," or "look," which can convey meaning beyond their literal usage (Yule, 1983). Such fillers help speakers manage poor planning, lack of coherence, or hesitation, and even include non-verbal elements like stutters or grunts (Susanto et al. 2021). Pamolango (2020) highlights that fillers often emerge when speakers pause to think about what to say next, serving as discourse markers to navigate temporary speech interruptions.

Exposing learners to spoken discourse elements, including fillers, enhances their spoken proficiency and helps them overcome communication challenges. This exposure not only aids in developing a natural-sounding use of language but also allows learners to understand and incorporate fillers effectively. Consequently, fillers play a dual role in spoken discourse: they give speakers time to think and express uncertainty, while also enriching communication by reflecting spontaneity and context.

2.5 The fluency of the speaker

According to Yang (2014), excessive use of filler words can reduce language proficiency and hinder fluency, which is a vital aspect of communicative language education. Fluency encompasses more than the absence of fillers; it includes speaking speed, rhythm, intonation, and the ability to convey ideas clearly and consistently. Strategies like intentional pausing, using transitional phrases, and practicing public speaking can enhance fluency while minimizing unnecessary filler words. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, fluency is often seen as the pinnacle of language mastery, making it a critical goal in language education (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Effective communication relies on the ability to express oneself smoothly and accurately, underscoring the importance of developing this skill in language learning environments (Khajani & Mazdayasna, 2022).

Despite its importance, many learners struggle with fluency due to difficulties in word production, pronunciation, grammar, and word choice (Sahan et al., 2023). These challenges often lead to the use of filler words as students search for the correct terms. Sukmana et al. (2023) highlight that fluency significantly

impacts students' ability to speak English confidently, with many learners aspiring to achieve seamless communication. Reducing filler words through focused practice and strategic communication techniques can improve fluency and enhance the speaker's confidence and clarity. Overall, achieving fluency requires not only linguistic competence but also deliberate efforts to minimize disruptions in speech.

3. METHODS

This study employed qualitative descriptive methods to analyze the use of fillers in spoken discourse among third-semester EFL students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Qualitative research, as Silverman (2020) explains, focuses on individual perspectives and experiences, offering a deeper understanding of significant human life phenomena. The research aimed to assess the proficiency of third-semester students, comparing their use of fillers with that of first-semester students. It sought to determine if the third-semester students had advanced their English proficiency after two years of study or maintained the same level as their peers in earlier semesters.

The study utilized a two-layer analysis approach. The first layer involved filler analysis, identifying the types of fillers most commonly used by third-semester students in their speaking video assignments. The second layer gathered data through interviews, exploring the factors influencing the use of fillers in their spoken discourse. This dual analysis aimed to examine the tendencies of EFL students in using fillers and to uncover patterns that might indicate language development, offering insights into their fluency and the impact of fillers on their speech.

The research was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, with participants drawn from third-semester students in the academic year 2022. The focus on this particular cluster allowed the researchers to explore trends in filler usage, identify factors that contribute to their frequent use, and assess whether there had been a notable improvement in speaking skills among these second-year students. Data for the study included spoken discourse video assignments from the third-semester EFL students, providing a rich source for analysis and comparison.

3.1 Data Collection

This research employed various data collection methods and instruments, including video assignments, interviews, and documentation, to gather comprehensive data. The first method, student video assignments, involved collecting spoken discourse videos from third-semester students. These videos, which included lecture or teaching videos on topics selected by the instructor, were converted into text format for further analysis. The collected videos provided valuable data for examining the use of fillers in students' spoken discourse in different contexts.

The second method used in this study was interviews, which helped gather in-depth information about students' perceptions and experiences with fillers. Structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to express their views individually, focusing on the factors influencing the use of fillers in their speech. As Dursun (2023) suggests, interviews serve as an interactive process for obtaining specific, detailed information. In this study, the interviews aimed to uncover the reasons behind students' filler usage, providing insight into their language production and fluency.

Lastly, the documentation method was used to gather supporting evidence and contextual information. Documentation involves collecting materials such as journals, books, and recordings that provide relevant data for the research focus. In this study, documentation was carried out through the use of tape recorders and cameras, capturing key moments during the interview process. Additionally, research sheets were used to document the context of data collection, which proved helpful in organizing and analyzing the gathered data (Waruwu, 2023). This combination of methods allowed for a well-rounded exploration of the research topic.

3.2 Data Analysis

This study used a two-layer data analysis approach. The first phase focused on investigating the types of fillers used in student videos. The videos, once collected, were transcribed into text format and categorized based on filler types. Following Rose (1998), the analysis distinguished between lexicalized and unlexicalized filled pauses. Lexicalized filled pauses include words or short phrases such as "okay," "like," or "you know," while unlexicalized filled pauses consist of sounds like "uh," "um," or "ah," which are often used in speech to fill pauses. This categorization allowed the researchers to identify the frequency and types of fillers in students' spoken discourse.

The second phase involved analyzing interview data from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to explore factors influencing filler usage, such as divided attention, infrequent words, and nervousness (Oomen & Postma, 2001). Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to ask follow-up questions and gather detailed insights into the reasons behind filler use. The interview process was carefully

documented, with recordings being transcribed and encrypted for confidentiality. The research also ensured that informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing transparency about the study's objectives and methods. Data were stored securely, and unique codes were used to protect participants' privacy, ensuring ethical standards were met throughout the research process.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study produced two main findings, namely the types of filler words used and the factors that influence the use of fillers by Third Semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at UNG.

4.1 Types of Fillers

This section analyzes the use of fillers in the spoken discourse assignments of third-semester students. Fillers such as "um," "uh," "well," "you know," and "I mean" are commonly used in spoken interactions to fill pauses and maintain fluency. According to Baalen (2001), these fillers can impact fluency and language proficiency when used excessively. The analysis in this study is based on Rose's (1998) classification of fillers into two categories: unlexicalized and lexicalized. The research investigates the types and frequency of fillers used by third-semester students in their spoken discourse video assignments, providing insight into their language development.

Table 1. Frequency of the Use of Filler Types Based on Rose (1998)

No	Types of Fillers	The frequency
1	Unlexicalized	92
2	Lexicalized	28
Total		122

Based on Table 1, the frequency of unlexicalized fillers (92 occurrences) significantly exceeds that of lexicalized fillers (28 occurrences). Unlexicalized fillers, such as "uh," "um," and "ehm," are non-verbal sounds that do not carry specific meaning, while lexicalized fillers like "okay," "you know," and "I mean" have more defined functions. The dominance of unlexicalized fillers suggests that most third-semester students rely on simple verbal pauses to maintain fluency. This finding reflects that many students have not yet fully integrated lexicalized fillers into their speech, which would signal a higher level of vocabulary mastery.

Table 2. Frequency of fillers in 3rd semester students' speaking discourse videos.

Types of Fillers	Fillers	Frequency
Lexicalized	So	11
	Okay	7
	Well	5
	You know	2
	I think	2
	I mean	2
	Yeah	1
	Total	30
Unlexicalized	Ee,	53
	Uh	18
	Ehm	11
	Uhm	10
	Total	92

Table 2 further illustrates the distribution of fillers. The most frequently used unlexicalized fillers were "Ee" (53 occurrences), "Uh" (18 occurrences), "Ehm" (11 occurrences), and "Uhm" (10 occurrences). These fillers allowed students to buy time and continue speaking while organizing their thoughts. Lexicalized fillers, although fewer in number, included words like "So," "Okay," and "Well," which play a crucial role in guiding the flow of conversation, signaling the speaker's intent, or introducing new ideas. The use of these fillers shows that some students are attempting to structure their speech more intentionally, though their overall vocabulary and filler use remain relatively simple.

The study highlights a clear difference in the use of unlexicalized versus lexicalized fillers, which may indicate varying levels of language proficiency. Students relying heavily on unlexicalized fillers may not have developed a broader vocabulary, suggesting they struggle with more complex language forms. In contrast, those incorporating lexicalized fillers are showing greater mastery of spoken discourse, as they can use these fillers to clarify or emphasize their points. This distinction reflects the students' ongoing development in spoken language skills, with those using lexicalized fillers exhibiting a more advanced command of English.

Examples of Lexicalized Fillers:

- "So": "So here I'm going to share..."
This filler is often used to introduce new information or indicate a shift in the conversation.
- "Okay": "Okay, that's all for me and see you..."
"Okay" serves to mark the end of a conversation or emphasize an important point.
- "Well": "Well, I have to have this including..."
"Well" is used to give the speaker time to think, often signaling that more information is coming.
- "You know": "You know what I mean?"
"You know" is used to seek confirmation or involve the listener in the conversation.

Examples of Unlexicalized Fillers:

- "Ee": "Made ee lifelong friend and discover..."
"Ee" acts as a pause filler while the speaker searches for the next word.
- "Uh": "Uh implies being whether..."
"Uh" helps maintain the flow when the speaker is unsure or gathering thoughts.
- "Ehm": "Now ehm I explained the issue..."
"Ehm" provides the speaker with extra time to think about their next point.
- "Uhm": "Uhm the term binde the significant corn..."
"Uhm" is used as a natural pause to maintain speech flow.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that while third-semester students rely primarily on unlexicalized fillers, the use of lexicalized fillers is also present, indicating varied language proficiency levels. The frequent use of unlexicalized fillers suggests that many students still struggle with vocabulary diversity in their spoken language, but the appearance of lexicalized fillers points to progress in their ability to manage conversational flow.

4.2 Factor Influence of Fillers

This study involved five third-semester students from the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) and aimed to explore the factors influencing the use of filler words in their spoken discourse video assignments. The interviews focused on understanding how often students were aware of using fillers and the situational factors that prompted their usage. The key factors identified were nervousness, infrequent words, and divided attention (Oomen & Postma, 2001). Students shared personal experiences about when and why they used filler words, revealing how these words functioned in their speech to maintain fluency and manage speaking challenges.

The first factor, nervousness, was found to influence the frequency of filler word use. As Burrell et al. (2024) suggest, high levels of nervousness often lead to faster, more irregular speech, with filler words becoming a way to reduce emotional stress during speaking. Students reported using fillers unconsciously when feeling nervous, such as during moments of hesitation or difficulty in constructing sentences. This finding aligns with Afriyanti and Andini (2020), who identified nervousness as a significant trigger for filler word use among EFL learners. These words act as pauses, giving students more time to think and manage their emotions while speaking.

Infrequent words were another key factor identified in the study. As Seals and Coppock (2022) highlighted, filler words often emerge when speakers struggle to find the right vocabulary, especially when dealing with less familiar words. Students admitted that they used fillers like "uh" and "you know" when they couldn't immediately recall the word they intended to use. This finding corresponds with Syamsudin's (2024) research, which noted that vocabulary limitations in EFL students often led to an increase in filler words. In such cases, fillers function as a cognitive tool to maintain the flow of conversation while the speaker searches for the appropriate word.

Additionally, divided attention emerged as a factor influencing filler use. According to Rawlinson and Kelley (2021), external distractions can lead to a loss of focus, prompting speakers to use fillers to regain their composure. This was evident in the experiences of students, particularly when unexpected situations during video recordings caused interruptions in their train of thought. Students reported that when their attention was divided, filler words became a mechanism for refocusing and maintaining the flow of communication. This aligns with Stevani et al. (2020), who emphasized that distractions often lead to filler word use as a way to manage communication during unexpected disruptions.

The study also explored how students used filler words within the context of their spoken discourse assignments. Students explained that fillers could enhance the natural flow of speech, making it more conversational and less formal. Furthermore, filler words like "so" or "okay" helped to emphasize points, clarify the speaker's intonation, and create a more relaxed atmosphere in the conversation, which is consistent with findings from Jeong et al. (2019).

In summary, this study not only reinforces existing research on filler words but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and linguistic factors that affect their use. By examining how nervousness, vocabulary limitations, and divided attention influence filler word usage, this research highlights the strategic role fillers play in maintaining the flow of conversation, especially in academic contexts like spoken discourse video assignments. The findings align with studies by Dornyei and Scott (1997), Oomen and Postma (2001), and others, showing that fillers are essential tools in managing communication challenges for EFL students.

4.3 Pedagogical Implication

This study highlights several important pedagogical implications for improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in the context of spoken discourse video assignments. One key implication is teaching students to use fillers strategically to support speaking fluency. Degand et al. (2019) suggest that fillers provide speakers with more time to plan their thoughts, which can be beneficial in formal settings. However, it is important for educators to balance this strategy by also focusing on reducing reliance on fillers through vocabulary development and structured speaking preparation. As Uchiyama and Clenton (2022) point out, a strong vocabulary foundation is essential for reducing filler usage, as students with limited vocabulary often use fillers to bridge gaps in speech. Introducing academic vocabulary and synonyms can help students construct sentences more fluently and confidently.

Additionally, managing nervousness and distractions plays a crucial role in minimizing filler word usage. Muhlack (2023) emphasizes that anxiety often triggers fillers, and strategies such as breathing exercises and planned pauses can help students manage stress and maintain focus while speaking. Structured preparation, as noted by Yenkimaleki and van Heuven (2023), is also vital in reducing anxiety and improving fluency, ensuring that students are better equipped to organize their ideas and reduce filler usage. By combining these strategies—using fillers as a tool for fluency, expanding vocabulary, preparing students effectively, and managing anxiety—educators can enhance students' speaking skills, fostering more fluent, confident, and focused communication in English.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study explores the types of fillers used by students in spoken discourse videos and the factors influencing their use. The findings reveal that unlexicalized fillers are most commonly used, while lexicalized fillers are rarely employed. This suggests that students may lack confidence and rely on fillers to support their speech. The research also identifies several factors contributing to the frequent use of fillers, including nervousness, limited preparation time, and pressures during the video recording process, such as the need to quickly structure the script and memorize content. These factors, combined with a lack of confidence, explain the high frequency of fillers in students' spoken discourse videos.

5.2 Suggestion/Recommendation

This study offers pedagogical implications for EFL speaking classes, particularly regarding spoken discourse video assignments. The frequent use of fillers by students highlights a need for greater confidence and vocabulary mastery. Educators should encourage vocabulary expansion through synonyms and academic word lists to reduce filler reliance. Factors such as time pressure and the assignment environment influenced the high frequency of fillers, indicating a need for better preparation and practice. Regular script preparation and practice can help alleviate these issues. This study provides valuable insights for assessing students' language development, particularly in relation to filler usage, and recommends future research to explore this topic further.

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