

The Use of Fillers by Indonesian Teachers in EFL Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

Fillers have an important role in communication, especially for teachers to improve their delivery style and communication skills, resulting in a more positive and efficient classroom environment for the students. Fillers often used by teachers when speaking but it is possible that they do not know what fillers are and how to use them. This study aims to explain the kinds and functions of fillers used by teachers in EFL classroom Interaction. This study implements descriptive qualitative method. The participants are students of in-serviced teacher program in Universitas Negeri Semarang 2022. The data is analyzed using the theory of filler types by Rose (1998), which are lexicalized and unlexicalized. In addition, this study also uses theory of filler functions by Stenstrom (1994), which are hesitation, empathizer, mitigation, time-creating device, and editing term. This study found two types of filler namely, lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers. Filler okay is the most lexicalized filler frequently used by the teachers. Filler uh is the most unlexicalized filler frequently used by the teachers. Further, this study found five functions of filler used in EFL classroom interaction, such as hesitation in 99 utterances, empathizer in 49 utterances, mitigation in 20 utterances, time-creating device in 14 utterances, and editing term in 6 utterances.

Keywords: Analysis, Classroom, Discourse, English, Fillers

INTRODUCTION

English is a vital language that is used in many parts of the world for communication, technology, and education. It is a proven language that has been used in teaching and learning processes not just in formal institutions, but also in formal institutes. In Indonesia, teaching and learning English through the mastery of the four language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and grammar) is compulsory for Indonesian students. This allows them to interact effectively with others in conversation, by

virtue of their ability to align each other's actions at different levels of language use. In the process of teaching and learning in the classroom, I experienced myself when I was doing an internship in one of Semarang's school some students made many or even some mistakes in their speaking activities. Not only students, the author myself as the pre-service teacher at that time also made mistakes while in the classroom such as being silent for a while because of nervousness when teaching, and being distracted when teaching and causing forgetting what to say next. These incidents

must have been experienced by teachers and students who caused as if they were not fluent in speaking English. When teaching English, teachers and students may use fillers to pause and obtain their thoughts or to buy time while speaking (Iemotey, 2024) and (Betz, 2020). The term filler is referred to “segmentally structured, semantically empty and syntactically unconstrained” (Belz, 2023). Awareness of these fillers and how they can affect communication as a language learner or instructor is necessary. English teachers and students frequently use fillers such as um, ah, like, you know, and okay (Douglas, 2022). Teachers can help students reduce their use of fillers and improve their fluency by identifying them, while students can learn to be more conscious of their own use of fillers and work to eliminate them when speaking. Understanding the use of fillers can also help improve overall communication and ensure that ideas are conveyed clearly and simply. Of course, there are ways to overcome if this happens but still look fluent in English. Based on the textbook, the speaking test assessment criteria include pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, comprehension, and fluency.

According to Richard and Schmidt (2010), grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. This is an important skill for students who want to make good or clear communication in English, as they have been exposed to this information throughout their school years. Regardless of the difficulties it may have caused at the time, or the later consequences for their speaking skills, students have come to believe that grammar is one of the most important aspects of learning English. This causes them to make mistakes when they are speaking because they only focus on the grammar of the sentence. Whereas in speaking many

important things besides grammar such as vocabulary, voice, and body language.

By forgetting the important aspects above, they sometimes make mistakes in speaking, such as talking slowly, pausing, and fillers. Many people who are learning a second language struggle to come up with the right words when they need a moment to think. These fillers can also be used to hold students' attention and keep them participating in the lesson or discussion. Fillers can also help the teacher highlight key things, add urgency or importance, and provide a rhythm to the speech or lesson. Teachers can improve their delivery style and communication skills by effectively using fillers, resulting in a more positive and efficient classroom environment for the students. In addition, teachers may use fillers in order to ensure that students are paying attention to them or not. And also, to ensure that what has been explained is understood by students or not. Whereas, students frequently use fillers in class for a variety of causes. One common reason is that they might feel nervous or anxious when speaking to their classmates or teacher. Fillers like um and like can help them gather their opinions and develop an answer. Furthermore, students may use fillers to indicate to the teacher that they still participate in the conversation even if they do not have a properly formed answer. Fillers can also be used to build rapport with classmates or even to express support for a speaking peer. While fillers are a natural part of the learning process, students should be aware of them and work to reduce their use in order to develop into more effective communicators. In this study, the researcher focuses more on the utterances of teachers who use fillers in classroom interactions.

METHODOLOGY

This study could be categorized as a qualitative approach since in this study

consists of more words than number. It can be seen in the findings of this study, which contains a lot of speech sentences. According to Creswell (2009) qualitative approach is done if the problem to be studied experienced by the researchers themselves. Therefore, since this study originated from the researchers' experience of fillers in classroom interaction and want to find more understanding about this issue, it was decided to conduct qualitative approach.

This study also implements an interaction analysis as the research design. According to Brigitte Jordan interaction analysis is a method for the empirical investigation of the human beings' interaction with each other and objects. Classroom interaction analysis falls within the area of classroom research studies and evolved from the need and desire to discover what happens in lessons and in the classroom (Tisher, 1972). The term of interaction in this context is in classroom interaction implies an action-reaction between student-students, teacher-student, student-teacher, and teacher-whole class.

Respondents

The object of this research is a senior high school that taught by students of Universitas Negeri Semarang in-serviced teacher program in 2022. Since the learning system is online, the assignment given is also online, in the form of making a video of teaching practice at school and it was uploaded on Youtube channel. The selected videos are located in five different locations and PPG students, yet are in the same group supervised by the same supervisor. There are two reasons why researchers select those videos because it has good sound and clear utterances so as not to hinder this research.

Instruments

In this research, researchers choose the PPG students who do learning practice in senior high school as research participants.

The participants are Budi, Mawar, Citra, Indah, and Putri, who are fictional name.

This study uses table of analysis based on transcription of classroom interaction video as instrument for collecting the data. The researcher make transcription based on in-service teacher video and analyze the classroom interaction then make a containing the filler type category according to Rose theory, and the filler's function according to Stentrom theory.

Data analysis

In this study, the researchers investigate filler words used by teacher and students in recorded videos of in-serviced teacher education in 2022. The researchers' main focus was to investigate the use and role of filler words in classroom interactions of PPG students' task in teaching practice. The researchers use qualitative analysis in this study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) there are 3 steps to analyze qualitative data.

Data Reduction

To find the types of fillers used by the teacher in classroom interaction, the researchers read the whole of the transcript from the video. The researchers then mark and categorize the word or phrase which contained fillers. In this process, the researcher ensures that the words or phrases in the video genuinely contain fillers or not by re-reading the transcript and re-watching to the video.

Data Display

Presenting of data analysis used classification tables to make it more systematic and structured, then the detail explanation of finding data is outside the table to be more specific. There are 3 types of analysis tables created to classify and explain the types and functions used, consisting of table of filler, table of filler types, and table of filler functions.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusion was drawn from the qualitative research conducted during the study. The researchers deal with conclusion to determine data cohesion and data unity. There are three stages, as follows interpreting the result of the analysis, discussing the result, and summarizing the result of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data of this findings were found after analyzing filler word in the classroom interaction videos of PPG students' task in teaching practice. The findings are provided using theory of fillers type based on Rose (1998) and theory of fillers function based on Stentrom (1994).

Finding 1

Types of Fillers

After analyzing data, it was found that there are two types of fillers in 194 utterances. The following is a data representation of each filler types used by teacher in classroom interaction.

Table 1. Filler types used by teachers

Type	Number
Lexicalized	85
Unlexicalized	109
Total	194

Based on the result of the analysis, it can be seen that both types of fillers according to Rose theory are used in classroom interaction with the number one hundred sixty-two. Those fillers appeared in five total classrooms, each classroom interaction had about thirty minutes duration. The teacher had eighty-five lexicalized fillers and one hundred-nine unlexicalized fillers. With details of fillers in lexicalized there were 23 fillers and unlexicalized are 2 fillers. The most dominant fillers uttered by the teacher was the unlexicalized uh which occurred 99 times. Also, there were as many as 16 lexicalized fillers which uttered only

once, such as don't forget, please, this class consist, it means, before that, based on, you have, you have to, for the next meeting, by the way, to, will, five, this, for, and the.

Lexicalized filler

Lexicalized filler is a filler in the form of a word or a short phrase. This section discussed 23 kinds of lexicalized filler used by the teacher in classroom interaction which the most frequent used are okay and yeah. The word okay was lexicalized filler appeared most often in the classroom interaction which occurred 37 times in classroom interaction, and followed by yeah which occurred 19 times. The details of lexicalized filler produced by the teacher in classroom interaction will be presented in the following:

(1) Okay

T : I will give you some gestures and then you will imitate and uhm you will uh practice what gesture that I saw to you, okay?

S : Yes

(2) Yeah

S : (read the learning goal) find detailed information from written recount text in the form of biographies of famous figure

T : okay, thank you Putri. Take a seat, please. Yeah, our learning goal or our learning objectives today is to find detailed information from written recount text in the form of biographies of famous figure.

Finding 2

Functions of filler

There are five functions of filler: hesitation, empathizer, mitigation, time-creating device, and editing term. The first one is hesitation; indicates that the speaker is using fillers to think about what to utter next. The second one is empathizer; shows that the speaker uses fillers to make the interlocutor pay attention to him/her and to ensure that the listener understands what the speaker

said. The third one is mitigation; a means of ending conversation about one event and moving on to another. The fourth one is time-creating device; a filler as a tool used by the speaker to buy time to think about what to say next. The last one is editing term; indicates that the filler is used to correct error in the previous utterance.

The following is the data representation of the filler function used by the teacher in the classroom interaction.

Table 2. Filler's function

No	Function	Number
1	Hesitation	99
2	Empathizer	49
3	Mitigation	20
4	Time-creating device	14
5	Editing term	6

As we can see in the table above, all of the filler's function were used by the teacher in the classroom interaction. Furthermore, hesitation was the filler function most frequently used by the teachers with the number of 99 times. Also, the least frequently used filler function was editing term with a total of 6 times.

Here were the explanations of each filler function used by the teacher:

(1) Hesitation

Hesitation was the most frequently function used by the teachers. There were examples of fillers that showed hesitation.

T : okay students, how are you today?

S : I'm fine, thank you. And you?

T : I'm fine too, thank you. Okay before we start our lesson today, please one of you... maybe the captain of this class. Yeah, please lead your friends to have uh pray first.

The use of uh in the sentence above indicated that the teacher tried to for the next words. She hesitated about what to say next that she wanted to say pray first, so she used filler uh.

(2) Empathizer

Empathizer appeared 48 times which showed that this function is the second function that was often used by the teachers. Below are examples of the use of fillers as empathizer.

S : Okay, degrees of comparison. First, definition is uh to compare something and the kind is positive degree, comparative degree, and superlative degree and the purpose is to show different to criticize and to praise.

T : Okay, give applause. Alright students, before starting the lessons, to be more motivated at the warming side, what if you do ice breaking. Are you ready for ice breaking?

In this example, the teacher used the word alright as a filler to get the students attention to what she wanted to say next. She uttered alright followed by an explanation of what the teacher and students would do next. Thus, the word alright which uttered by the teacher above could be concluded as empathizer.

(3) Mitigation

The teachers also used fillers as mitigation which appeared 20 times. In the following are the examples of mitigation.

T : What game do you want to play?

S : Mobile Legends and Free Fire (discussing with group 3)

T : Okay guys the time is up. So, now is your turn to make the presentation the online presentation you have to upload your works on the Padlet, the link of the Padlet I will share it on WhatsApp group, yeah.

In that example, the teacher used the filler word so not as a function of empathizer. Rather, it was a mitigation to end the

discussion activities carried out by students, followed by giving instructions to students to make presentation on the result of their discussion.

(4) Time-creating device

In the classroom interaction also found the use of fillers as time-creating device which appeared 14 times. Below are the instances of time-creating device.

T : hi?

S : hallo

T : okay, before assess your friends work, please ... please check the scoring rubric, yeah.

In that example above, the teacher repeated word please indicated that she was buying time to think what to say next. Normally, the repetition of the word showed time-creating device. Thus, we could conclude that she used repeated word as time-creating device.

(5) Editing term

The least filler function used by the teachers was editing term which appeared 6 times. Here the instances of editing term.

S : One, watch your favorite childhood movies. Two, go through the App Store and look for cool apps. Three, back up your laptop and your phone. Four, try fun nail art. Five, write a letter to your future self.

T : Okay, thank you. Yes, the first one you can uh what you can do in your home when you are bored. Yeah, the first one is watch your favorite movie sorry watch your favorite childhood movie not chillhood yeah, childhood and then number one go through the App Store and look for cool apps, three back up your laptop and phone, four try fun nail art, and five write a letter to your future self.

From the example above, the teacher use word sorry to correct the error in the

previous utterance. She said your favorite movie followed by sorry to justify her sentence with what she should have wanted to say. In this context, the word sorry used by teacher as editing term.

Discussion

1. Filler types

For filler types, it has been explained in the findings of this study that all types of filler in the theory proposed by Rose (1998) are uttered by the teachers in EFL classroom interaction. Those types are lexicalized filler and unlexicalized filler. This finding is also in line with the study conducted by Efendi et. al (2024); Navratilova (2015); Lemotey (2021) and which found two types of filler, namely lexicalized and unlexicalized in students argumentative talks. This is also supported by Andriani (2018), she finds out two types of fillers used by students with high and low levels of proficiency in their spontaneous speech, which are lexicalized and unlexicalized. Meanwhile, Mariam (2014) finds lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers used by high and low proficiency in EFL students group discussion. There are also similarities in the findings on unlexicalized fillers that the most frequently used. However, those three studies were conducted on EFL students. Meanwhile, this study takes data from EFL teachers.

The current study's findings find only two unlexicalized fillers in classroom interaction, where teachers only used uh and uhm. The findings are similar to the study conducted by Meylana et al. (2022); Hoey (2020); and Trouvain and Werner (2022) which finds only two unlexicalized fillers produced by the English senior high school students in answering oral question. This is done in the usual teaching and learning activities. However, in the intervals, the teacher asks questions to the students without giving the students any preparation to create a spontaneous situation.

2. Filler functions

Functions found in this study are hesitation, empathizer, mitigation, time-creating device, and editing term, in line with Aliyah and Hestrian (2021); Nurfadilah et al (2021). From the findings, hesitation is the most dominant filler function used by teachers in classroom interaction with the number of 99 times. The findings align with study conducted by Pamolango (2016), who finds hesitation as the most frequently used by 8 Asian students with percentage of 38.4%, followed by empathizer function with percentage of 37%, filler function as time-creating device with percentage of 19.9%, editing term function with percentage of 3.3%, and the last one is holder the turn with percentage of 1.4%.

After comparing with previous studies, we can see that there are some similarities and differences in one study with another. The similarity with the previous study lies in the types used, which consist of lexicalized and unlexicalized with functions that appear with hesitation, empathizer, mitigation, time-creating device, and editing term. Meanwhile, the difference that emerges is in the number of frequency of types and functions used. In this study, the frequently used type is unlexicalized and the frequently used function is hesitation. The findings about the type of filler contradict the study of Fatimah (2017), Mooneeb Ali et al. (2023), and Lomotey (2021) where the lexicalized type of filler is the most frequent. Furthermore, the findings about the function of these fillers also contradict the study of Fitriati et al. (2021) and Navratilova (2015) where the functions as empathizer and filling pauses are the most frequently used functions. By looking at this difference, it can be said that the use of fillers is highly influenced by the level of foreign language speaking proficiency.

The teachers in this study may not have learned about fillers because we can see that in one sentence spoken by the teacher there can be more than one filler. Therefore, it is very necessary to learn about fillers for teachers in training as in this study. It is true that there have been many studies on fillers, but there is no specific learning on fillers. As in the study of Erten (2014), he stated that the absence of learning about fillers is due to the fact that many think that fillers are a deficiency in speaking. In fact, the use of fillers can make communication run smoothly because native speakers also use fillers when communicating. Moreover, once teachers understand the importance of these fillers, they can use them as communicative strategies in teaching. Cahyani et al. (2023) support the above assumption by mentioning that teachers use fillers to maintain communication and the flow of interaction in the classroom is proven to be effective.

CONCLUSION

This study found 194 data points on the types of fillers teachers produce in classroom interactions. Teachers produce two types of fillers, namely lexicalised fillers and non-lexicalised fillers. The researchers found 85 lexicalised fillers and 109 non-lexicalised fillers. The lexicalised fillers that appeared in this study were okay, yeah, alright, do not forget, please, this class consists, it means, before that, based on, sorry, you have, you have to, for the next meeting, by the way, to, will, five, now, so, right, this, for, and the. Meanwhile, the unlexicalised fillers found in this study were uh and uhm. The most frequently occurring filler word is 'okay' with 37 occurrences, while the most frequently occurring unlexicalised filler word in this study is 'uh' with 99 occurrences.

The researchers identified five functions of fillers: hesitation, empathy, mitigation, time-buying, and editing. One hundred eighty-six utterances demonstrated

the functions produced by teachers, consisting of 99 utterances for the hesitation function, 49 for empathy, 20 for mitigation, 14 for time-buying, and 6 for editing. The number of fillers found is significant and it can influence students' input and output in learning. Teachers should use fillers more wisely and pay attention to communication patterns.

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