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An Analysis of the Types of Fillers Produced by English Learners in Speaking

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the types of fillers produced by English learners within the three functional categories of speaking: interaction, transaction, and performance. It aims to address the limited research on the specific forms and functions of fillers among English learners, explore the reasons behind their use in speech, and offer pedagogical insights into improving speaking fluency. The findings reveal that learners used fillers most frequently during speaking as transaction, a context they perceived as more formal, prompting cautious speech and increased filler use to maintain fluency. Unlexicalized fillers, particularly the sound *'ee'*, were used significantly more than lexicalized fillers. This preference was influenced by the ease of producing simple sounds, lower proficiency levels, and mother tongue interference. The study underscores the importance of recognizing fillers as a natural aspect of spoken language and suggests that understanding their use can help develop more realistic and supportive approaches to teaching speaking skills.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a very important tool for humans to communicate. Language allows individuals to express ideas, convey emotions, and build social relationships. According to Kaharuddin (2021), language serves as a system of communication that enables individuals to share and exchange messages with one another. This system operates through fundamental elements such as sounds, words, phrases, sentences, and meanings, which together form the foundation of meaningful interaction and understanding among people. In linguistic terms, language is described as a system made up of random sound symbols that members of a community use to work together, communicate, and express their identity (Oviogun & Veerdee, 2020). Where it means that language is not just a group of words, but it is also a system that has structure and rules.

As a means of communication, language plays an invaluable role for humans in their social environment. There are several functions of language that indicate its significance. Apriyanto (2022) argues that language has five main functions as a tool of human communication, including expressiveness, information, exploration, persuasion, and enjoyment. Language serves multiple purposes, not just for giving and receiving information. It is also used to express feelings, emotions, or personal thoughts. Furthermore, language functioned to influence or convince others. Lastly, it also allows humans to have entertainment. People can have fun and exciting interactions.

Language skills serve as a fundamental component of effective communication, enabling individuals to convey their messages clearly and accurately. These skills encompass the capacity to comprehend and utilize language across various dimensions. According to Bano et al., (2023), there are four aspects of language proficiency, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Language is a complex skill that encompasses four essential components. They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Sharma & puri, 2020). Thus, all elements of language proficiency form the basis of effective

communication. Mastery of these skills allows individuals to convey messages in a clearer and more organized manner, making them easier for others to comprehend.

Speaking, as one of the fundamental components of language proficiency, is an essential skill that should be acquired by all individuals, particularly English Learners. Rahmawati & Lustyantie, (2023) emphasize that in the process of learning English, developing speaking skills is among the most crucial aspects to master. Speaking plays a central role in communication. It allows learners to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions directly in real-time interactions. Therefore, mastering speaking skills is crucial for effective use of the language in everyday situations, academic settings, and professional environments. To be an effective and well-rounded communicator, it is important to develop proficiency in all four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, having strong speaking abilities offers the speaker several unique benefits (Kadamovna, 2021). Mastering speaking skills allows English learners to express ideas clearly, engage in conversations confidently, and influence or persuade others effectively. In addition, speaking serves as a crucial means for conveying thoughts, exchanging information, and fostering connections with others (Dionar & Adnan, 2018).

As cited in Kaharuddin et al., (2018), Richard (2008) explains that individuals engage in speaking to fulfill three functions of speaking as interaction, transaction, and performance. Speaking as interaction involves spoken communication aimed at building social relationships and meeting interpersonal needs through two-way participation. Kaharuddin et al., (2018) emphasize that this type of speaking typically occurs in interpersonal and social conversations, serving interactional purposes. These interactions are observed in both casual and classroom settings. Speaking as transaction, on the other hand, focuses on the exchange of information. As described by Arafah & Kaharuddin (2015), this function engages two or more speakers in communicative activities such as interviews, discussions, and debates, where the primary objective is to convey information. Lastly, speaking as performance refers to monologic speech delivered in formal settings, such as presentations or speeches. It aims to transmit information clearly to an audience and fulfill communicative goals in public contexts (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2015).

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that speaking constitutes a complex cognitive activity, requiring the integration of multiple components of language production to accurately convey a message from the speaker's thoughts to the listener's comprehension. From the perspective of psycholinguistics, language production consists of three main phases. There are generating ideas (conceptualization), structuring those ideas into linguistic form (formulation), and producing speech (articulation) (Levelt, 1989) as cited in (Kaharuddin, 2024). This is in line with Marzona (2017), who states that language production is systematically organized into three stages, namely conceptualization, where the speaker determines the intended message; formulation, in which the message is linguistically structured; and articulation, the stage where the structured message is vocally delivered.

Various interruptions or difficulties can occur during the process of language production, which can hinder fluency. Clark (1996), as cited in Clark & Fox Tree (2002), identifies three types of disruptions in speech, namely delays in producing speech, pauses that may be silent or filled with sounds or words, and the speaker's eventual ability to resume fluent speech. When speakers experience a delay in speech and attempt to maintain the flow of conversation, they often insert what is known as fillers. Maclay & Osgood (2015) classified vocalizations such as *"uh"* and *"um"* as filled pauses, which they identified as one of four types of hesitation. Similarly, Tottie (2016) categorized *"uh"* and *"um"* as fillers, this view is also supported by Clark & Fox (2002), who considered them as fillers. On the other hand, Corley & Stewart, (2008) referred to these expressions as hesitation disfluencies, emphasizing their role in marking cognitive processing difficulties during speech production. This study adopts the term fillers to describe hesitation phenomena in speech, as it is widely used in relevant literature and effectively captures the function of such expressions in managing pauses and maintaining the flow of spoken discourse. The use of fillers as a form of hesitation is relatively complex, and this study will demonstrate how fillers are utilized and how they indicate hesitation during speech.

In producing fillers, speakers initially recognize a need to delay speech, then select and formulate a filler that aligns with the intended pause duration, followed by its articulation. The use of fillers is closely linked to underlying cognitive processes involved in language production. According to Clark & Fox Tree (2002), utterances such as "*uh*" and "*um"* reflect various mental activities, including planning appropriate expressions, retrieving specific vocabulary, signaling difficulty in recalling information, and indicating the expected length of the delay through the duration of the filler.

Language production involves mental and cognitive processes that occur in the speaker's mind. Basurto Santos (2020) argues that fillers can signal these internal processes, showing the link between thinking and speaking. Fillers, often studied in psycholinguistics, serve as indicators of such processing. Psycholinguists were among the first to examine fillers like *"uh"* and *"um"* (Erten, 2014). Much of the research on fillers continues within this field. These are often referred to as psychological pauses, which may be filled with either non-lexical sounds or lexical fillers. This study focuses on the use of fillers in spoken language.

Fillers function as discourse markers that signal hesitation or ongoing cognitive processing during speech (Erten, 2014). According to Baalen (2001), fillers are expressions that can occur at any point in a sentence and can be omitted without altering its core message. While fillers may lack lexical meaning, they contribute to the delivery and interpretation of spoken language. This view aligns with Basurto Santos (2020), who argued that fillers support the communicative intent of speech without being part of its propositional content.

Fillers are a natural and unavoidable feature of spoken language, commonly used even by native speakers. As noted by Khojastehrad (2012), native speakers tend to use fillers more strategically and with greater control compared to non-native speakers. Scholars hold differing views on the use of fillers in speech. Some consider them beneficial for organizing thoughts and planning subsequent utterances (Hassan et al., 2021; Mahendra & Bram, 2019), emphasizing their natural and functional role in communication. However, others argue that excessive use of fillers may hinder fluency, indicate a lack of fluency, and negatively affect speech quality (Stevani et al., 2018; Yulpia, 2025).

The term fillers refers to words or phrases used to occupy pauses in speech without contributing substantive meaning. Common examples include *"um," "uh," "like,"* and *"you know."* Gleason and Ratner (1998), as cited in Soma (2023), describe such elements alongside hesitations, repetitions, and false starts as speech disfluencies, which typically occur every five to eight words and offer valuable insights into the planning and organization of speech production. Furthermore, fillers can be classified into distinct types based on their form and function.

Rose (1998) categorizes fillers into two main types, namely unlexicalized fillers, such as *"er," "erm," "err,"* and *"errm,"* and *lexicalized fillers*, including expressions like *"and," "you know," "so that," "in that," "and so," "well,"* and *"but."* Meanwhile, Afriyanti & Andini (2020) propose a classification based on some other expert perspectives, identifying three types of fillers, they are sound fillers e.g., *"ehm," "ee," "urr"*, which are used to fill silent pauses when speakers lose their train of thought; filler words e.g., *"yeah," "ok," "well"*, which help maintain coherence in discourse; and phrase fillers e.g., *"I mean," "and now," "and then"*, which serve to clarify message boundaries and signal topic transitions.

Several previous studies have explored the use of fillers in EFL contexts. Adini et al., (2021) examined the types of fillers used by students and identified various factors influencing their usage. Similarly, Fitriati et al., (2021)investigated both the types and communicative functions of fillers among Indonesian EFL Master's students. Nurfadilah et al. (2021) also focused on the use of fillers, analyzing lexicalized sounds, words, and phrases along with their respective functions in student speech. While these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily emphasize general classifications and usage without exploring the use of fillers across different communicative functions of speaking.

Thus, this study is guided by three main objectives. First, it seeks to address the limited number of studies that specifically examine the types of fillers produced by English language learners, particularly in the context of spoken communication. While fillers have been widely discussed in general fluency research, detailed investigations into their specific forms and functions among EFL learners remain scarce. Second, this research aims to deepen the understanding of how and why English learners use fillers during speech. Exploring the cognitive and communicative functions of fillers can offer valuable insight into the challenges learners face in real-time language production. Furthermore, this research is grounded in the three functional categories of speaking: speaking as interaction, speaking as transaction, and speaking as performance. By adopting this framework, the study enables a comparative analysis of the types of fillers used across different speaking purposes, Third, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and realistic approaches to teaching speaking skills, particularly by incorporating a more nuanced understanding of fluency that acknowledges the natural presence of fillers in spoken discourse.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative method, selected for its suitability in thoroughly answering the research hypothesis. The qualitative approach enabled a deep investigation into the topic, offering a nuanced and comprehensive insight into the phenomenon being examined. Through this method, the research sought to deliver detailed, organized, and systematic descriptions of the data collected.

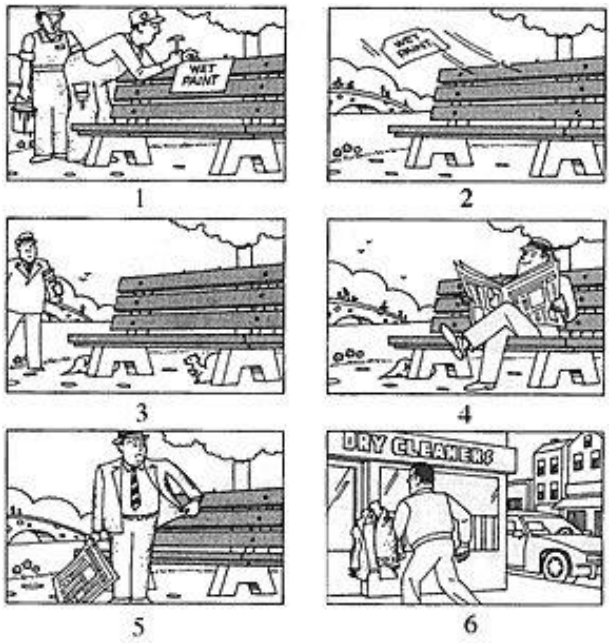
The participants in this study were third-semester students from the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Out of a total population of 93 students, a sample of 16 students was selected using a purposive sampling technique.

To collect data on the types of fillers, the researcher employed three speaking tests with a sample of 16 third-semester students. The first was a role-play dialogue representing speaking as interaction. Role-play was selected because it encourages students to use English creatively in simulated conversational settings, thereby enhancing their communicative abilities (Stephen D. Hattings, 1993, in Purnamawati et al., 2019). According to Rahayu (2015), role-play involves students adopting assigned roles and engaging in conversations based on those roles. In this study, a role-play dialogue was used as a data collection instrument, where students initiated conversations aligned with their given characters, and the researcher recorded their interactions for later analysis. The pre-recording procedure followed the framework outlined by Kaharuddin (2016). The role-play procedure was adapted from Arif et al., (2019) and included the following steps: (1) students were paired into groups, (2) all groups received the same role-play topic, (3) students created dialogues based on given scenarios, (4) after brief practice, (5) each group performed their dialogue in front of the researcher. The chosen topic was "hobbies," as it is familiar and personally meaningful to students, making it easier for them to express opinions. Discussing topics that individuals enjoy particularly those related to themselves is an effective way to encourage participation and engagement (Artiningsih, 2023).

The second test was a structured interview, aligned with speaking as transaction. Transactional speaking involves the exchange of information, often found in interviews or discussions (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2015). The interview method was deemed appropriate for intermediate and advanced learners, as it allows them to effectively articulate ideas (Rasyid, 2014). In this study, a structured interview was employed as the instrument for analyzing speaking as transaction, specifically to identify the types of fillers used by participants. Structured interviews involve predetermined questions that remain fixed throughout the process, ensuring a focused discussion, though potentially limiting the depth of responses (Alijoyo et al., 2022). The interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded for subsequent analysis. The pre-recording stage followed the procedure outlined by Kaharuddin (2016). Alshenqeeti (2014) argues that interviews are inherently interactive and allow for detailed exploration of the participants' perspectives, with various formats such as structured, semi-structured, and focus group interviews each offering distinct benefits. In this study, the researcher

adapted the four-step interview process proposed by Brown (2004), which includes warm-up, level check, probe, and wind-down, to guide the speaking test.

The third test was a picture description task, representing speaking as performance. This form of speaking emphasizes delivering information to an audience in a monologue format, such as in presentations or speeches (Richards, 2008, as cited in Kaharuddin et al., 2018). In this task, students describe a sequence of images, promoting structured monologic speech (Rasyid, 2014). Each test was purposefully chosen to reflect a distinct speaking function and effectively elicit filler usage in varied communicative contexts. According to Rasyid (2014), visual aids such as pictures are effective tools for evaluating learners' language proficiency, particularly speaking skills, as they prompt students to articulate their thoughts. In this study, the researcher employed a picture description task to assess speaking as performance. Participants were shown an image and asked to describe it, with each session conducted individually and recorded for further analysis. The pre-recording procedure and test design were adapted from Kaharuddin (2016). The selected images featured familiar and easily identifiable objects to facilitate clear and accessible descriptions by the participants. The following is the image used by the researcher in the speaking as performance test.



Picture 1 A Sequence of Images was Used for the Speaking as Performance Test.

Source: Kaharuddin (2016)

The researcher employed a three-stage process for analyzing the data, integrating both descriptive and interpretive approaches. The qualitative data were first quantified through percentage analysis, followed by detailed interpretation. According to A. H. Yassi & Kaharuddin (2018), the analysis involves: (1) identifying dominant data and commenting on percentage results, (2) supporting findings with interview data or theoretical synthesis, and (3) drawing conclusions based on the analysis. Similarly, Miles et al., (2014) outline three key components of qualitative data analysis: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The researcher applied a structured and systematic approach to qualitative data analysis, combining percentage interpretation with theoretical and interview-based insights to draw meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fillers are categorized into two types, namely lexicalized fillers, that is consist of words or short phrases such as *"you know," "well,"* and *"so"* and unlexicalized fillers, which are non-lexical sounds like *"er"* and *"erm"* (Rose, 1998). These fillers do not carry specific meaning but function to maintain the flow of speech during pauses. Based on the analysis of transcripts derived from participants' voice recordings, the researcher identified the types of fillers used by Indonesian learners of English across the three speaking functions.

1. Types of fillers in speaking as Interaction

Based on the transcript of the speaking-as-interaction recording, which involved a role-play dialogue performed by 16 participants grouped into 8 pairs, two key findings were identified: the total number of fillers produced and the types of fillers used. The detailed findings are presented below.

Table 1 The Number of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Interaction

No.	Pair Respondent	Types of Fillers				Total	%
		Lexicalized	%	Unlexicalized	%		
1	Pair 1	1	0.74	5	3.68	6	4.41
2	Pair 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
3	Pair 3	**17**	**12.50**	**11**	**8.09**	28	20.59
4	Pair 4	**33**	**24.26**	**43**	**31.62**	76	55.88
5	Pair 5	**6**	**4.41**	**13**	**9.56**	19	13.97
6	Pair 6	0	0.00	1	0.74	1	0.74
7	Pair 7	0	0.00	1	0.74	1	0.74
8	Pair 8	4	2.94	1	0.74	5	3.68
Total		**61**	**44.85**	**75**	**55.15**	**136**	100

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

Table 1 presents the data on the use of fillers during speaking as interaction. A total of 136 fillers were identified, comprising 75 unlexicalized fillers (55.15%) and 61 lexicalized fillers (44.85%). Unlexicalized fillers were used more frequently, with the highest individual usage recorded at 43 instances (31.62%), followed by 13 (9.56%) and 11 (8.09%). For lexicalized fillers, the highest individual usage was 33 (24.26%), followed by 17 (12.50%) and 6 (4.41%). The predominance of unlexicalized fillers, such as "uh" or "ee," during the role-play dialogues suggests that participants were more accustomed to using non-lexical vocalizations to manage pauses and hesitation. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Vrika & Diananseri (2022), Fatimah et al., (2017), and Meylana et al., (2022), which also reported a higher frequency of unlexicalized filler use in conversational contexts. In conclusion, unlexicalized fillers were more frequently and consistently used than lexicalized fillers in speaking as interaction, indicating their natural integration in learners' spoken English.

Table 2 The Types of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Interaction

No.	lexicalized Fillers	Total	%	Unlexicalized Fillers	Total	%
1	**So**	**20**	**14.71**	**Ee**	**54**	**39.71**
2	Alright	3	2.21	**Erm**	**12**	**8.82**
3	**Okay**	**14**	**10.29**	Errm	7	5.15

4	And	5	3.68	Ehm	2	1.47
5	You know	1	0.74			
6	Like	6	4.41			
7	And then	4	2.94			
8	And also	1	0.74			
9	But	5	3.68			
10	Well	1	0.74			
11	Maybe	1	0.74			
	Total	**61**	**44.85**		**75**	**55.15**

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

Table 2 reveals that unlexicalized fillers were produced more frequently than lexicalized fillers during speaking as interaction. The filler *'ee'* was the most commonly used, with 54 occurrences (39.71%), followed by *'erm'* with 12 instances (8.82%). Among lexicalized fillers, *'so'* appeared most frequently (20 times or 14.71%), followed by *'okay'* (14 times or 10.29%). These findings suggest that participants habitually relied on the unlexicalized filler *'ee'* in their interactive speech, a pattern also observed by the researcher during field observation. This aligns with Fatimah et al., (2017), who similarly found *'ee'* to be the most frequent unlexicalized filler used in conversational contexts. Thus, the dominance of *'ee'* highlights its role as a prominent hesitation marker in English interactions among learners.

2. Types of Fillers in Speaking as Transaction

Based on the transcripts of 16 structured interview recordings categorized as speaking as transaction, two main aspects were analyzed: the frequency of filler occurrences and the types of fillers used by participants throughout the interviews.

Table 3 The Number of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Transaction

No.	Respondent	Types of Fillers				Total	%
		Lexicalized	%	Unlexicalized	%		
1	R1	**25**	**8.74**	**47**	**16.43**	72	25.17
2	R2	3	1.05	23	8.04	26	9.09
3	R3	1	0.35	5	1.75	6	2.10
4	R4	0	0.00	8	2.80	8	2.80
5	R5	1	0.35	8	2.80	9	3.15
6	R6	1	0.35	12	4.20	13	4.55
7	R7	**4**	**1.40**	7	2.45	11	3.85
8	R8	1	0.35	0	0.00	1	0.35
9	R9	**5**	**1.75**	**24**	**8.39**	29	10.14
10	R10	3	1.05	**32**	**11.19**	35	12.24
11	R11	0	0.00	15	5.24	15	5.24
12	R12	1	0.35	18	6.29	19	6.64
13	R 13	1	0.35	5	1.75	6	2.10
14	R 14	1	0.35	20	6.99	21	7.34

15	R 15	2	0.70	8	2.80	10	3.50
16	R 16	0	0.00	5	1.75	5	1.75
Total		**49**	**17.13**	**237**	**82.87**	**286**	100

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

As presented in Table 3, a total of 286 fillers were identified during speaking as transaction, with unlexicalized fillers occurring more frequently (237 instances or 82.87%) than lexicalized fillers (49 instances or 17.13%). The most frequent unlexicalized filler was used 47 times (16.43%), followed by 32 times (11.19%) and 24 times (8.39%). For lexicalized fillers, the highest occurrence was 25 times (8.74%), followed by 5 times (1.40%) and 4 times (1.75%). This indicates a strong preference for unlexicalized fillers during structured interviews, which were often used spontaneously by participants. These findings align with previous studies, such as Arrasul (2002), Juliano et al. (2022), and Hassan et al. (2021), which also reported a dominant use of unlexicalized fillers in interviews. In conclusion, the frequent use of unlexicalized fillers highlights their prominent role in learners' communication strategies and underscores the need for targeted instructional support in improving fluency during structured spoken interactions.

Table 4 The Types of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Transaction

No.	lexicalized Fillers	Total	%	Unlexicalized Fillers	Total	%
1	So	9	3.15	**Ee**	**193**	**67.48**
2	Okay	3	1.05	Erm	20	6.99
3	**And**	**15**	**5.24**	**Errm**	**24**	**8.39**
4	You know	4	1.40			
5	**Like**	**15**	**5.24**			
6	But	2	0.70			
7	Maybe	1	0.35			
Total		**49**	**17.13**		**237**	**82.87**

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

Table 4 reveals that unlexicalized fillers were the most frequently used by students in speaking as a transaction, with 'ee' being the dominant filler, occurring 193 times (67.48%), followed by 'errm' at 24 times (8.39%). In contrast, the most frequently used lexicalized fillers, 'and' and 'like' each appeared 15 times (5.24%). These findings suggest a strong preference for unlexicalized fillers, particularly 'ee', during transactional speech. This is in line with previous studies, such as Y. Rahmawati & Farida (2025), Muchsani (2023), and Juliano et al. (2022), all of which reported the high frequency of unlexicalized fillers like 'uh' or 'ee' in similar contexts. Therefore, 'ee' can be seen as the most prominent unlexicalized filler in transactional speaking, reflecting its role in students' spontaneous speech patterns.

3. Types of Fillers in Speaking as Performance

The transcript from the speaking as performance data, comprising 16 recordings of participants completing a picture description task, was analyzed based on two key aspects: the frequency of fillers used and the types of fillers employed during the descriptions.

Table 5 The Number of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Performance

No.	Respondent	Types of Fillers				Total	%
		Lexicalized	%	Unlexicalized	%		
1	R1	0	0.00	7	3.72	7	3.72
2	R2	**13**	**6.91**	**19**	**10.11**	32	17.02
3	R3	1	0.53	**21**	**11.17**	22	11.70
4	R4	2	1.06	**15**	**7.98**	17	9.04
5	R5	1	0.53	2	1.06	3	1.60
6	R6	**5**	**2.66**	9	4.79	14	7.45
7	R7	0	0.00	15	7.98	15	7.98
8	R8	2	1.06	2	1.06	4	2.13
9	R9	0	0.00	5	2.66	5	2.66
10	R10	2	1.06	9	4.79	11	5.85
11	R11	**7**	**3.72**	7	3.72	14	7.45
12	R12	4	2.13	2	1.06	6	3.19
13	R 13	1	0.53	5	2.66	6	3.19
14	R 14	2	1.06	7	3.72	9	4.79
15	R 15	3	1.60	3	1.60	6	3.19
16	R 16	2	1.06	15	7.98	17	9.04
Total		**45**	**23.94**	**143**	**76.06**	**188**	100

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

The data in Table 5 shows that a total of 188 fillers were used during the speaking as performance activity, with unlexicalized fillers occurring more frequently (143 times or 76.06%) than lexicalized fillers (45 times or 23.94%). The most frequently used unlexicalized fillers occurred 21 times (11.17%), 19 times (10.11%), and 15 times (7.98%), while the most common lexicalized fillers appeared 13 times (6.91%), 7 times (3.72%), and 5 times (2.66%), respectively. This pattern indicates a clear preference for unlexicalized fillers during the picture description task. These findings align with previous studies by Efendi et al. (2024), Dahlia et al. (2023), Indriyana et al. (2021), and Nurrahmi et al. (2021), which also reported a higher frequency of unlexicalized fillers in student presentations. Therefore, it can be concluded that unlexicalized fillers are more dominant in speaking as performance, suggesting that speakers heavily rely on them to maintain fluency in structured speech tasks.

Table 6 The Types of Fillers Produced in Speaking as Performance

No.	Lexicalized Fillers	Total	%	Unlexicalized Fillers	Total	%
1	**So**	**16**	**8.51**	**Ee**	**126**	**67.02**
2	**Okay**	**9**	**4.79**	**Erm**	**15**	**7.98**
3	And	8	4.26	Errm	2	1.06
4	You know	1	0.53			
5	Like	8	4.26			
6	And then	2	1.06			

7	Well	1	0.53		
	Total	**45**	**23.94**	**143**	**76.06**

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

The data on the table above indicates that the most frequently used type of filler in speaking as performance was unlexicalized fillers. Specifically, the unlexicalized filler *''ee''* appeared 126 times (67.02%), followed by *''erm''* with 15 occurrences (7.98%). Among lexicalized fillers, *''so''* ranked highest with 16 instances (8.51%), followed by *''okay''* with 9 occurrences (4.79%). This suggests a strong tendency among participants to rely on unlexicalized fillers, particularly *''ee'',* when engaged in picture description tasks. These findings are consistent with prior research. Efendi et al. (2024) and Dahlia et al. (2023) found that *''uhh''* was the most frequently used unlexicalized filler in student presentations. Similarly, Firiady & Mahendra (2019) as well as Mahendra & Bram (2019), reported that the unlexicalized filler *''err''* was the most commonly produced by speakers. In conclusion, *''ee''* emerged as the dominant unlexicalized filler in speaking as performance, underscoring its central role in maintaining fluency during oral production.

To assist in identifying the various types of fillers across the three speaking functions, the researcher provided the following tables summarizing the overall data on lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers.

Unlexicalized Fillers

Table 7 The Total Unlexicalized Fillers Used in the Three Functions of Speaking

Unlexicalized Fillers									
No	**List of Fillers**	**Speaking as Interaction**	**%**	**Speaking as Transaction**	**%**	**Speaking as Performance**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
1	Ee	**54**	11.87	**193**	42.42	**126**	27.69	**373**	81.98
2	Erm	12	2.64	20	4.40	15	3.30	**47**	10.33
3	Errm	7	1.54	24	5.27	2	0.44	33	7.25
4	Ehm	2	0.44	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.44
Total		**75**	**16.48**	**237**	**52.09**	**143**	**31.43**	**455**	100

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

As shown in Table 7, a total of 455 unlexicalized fillers were recorded across all speaking functions. The most frequent were 'ee' (373 occurrences or 81.98%) and 'erm' (47 occurrences or 10.33%). Four types were identified: 'ee,' 'erm,' 'errm,' and 'ehm.' Consistent with Rose (1998), who described unlexicalized fillers as pause-filling sounds like 'er' and 'erm,' this study found that participants used similar fillers during role-play dialogues, interviews, and picture description tasks.

Lexicalized Fillers

Table 8 The Total Unlexicalized Fillers Used in the Three Functions of Speaking

Lexicalized Fillers									
No	**List of Fillers**	**Speaking as Interaction**	**%**	**Speaking as Transaction**	**%**	**Speaking as Performance**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
1	So	20	12.90	9	5.81	16	10.32	**45**	**29.03**

2	Alright	3	1.94	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	1.94
3	Okay	14	9.03	3	1.94	9	5.81	26	16.77
4	And	5	3.23	15	9.68	8	5.16	28	18.06
5	You know	1	0.65	4	2.58	1	0.65	6	3.87
6	Like	6	3.87	15	9.68	8	5.16	**29**	**18.71**
7	And then	4	2.58	0	0.00	2	1.29	6	3.87
8	And also	1	0.65	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.65
9	But	5	3.23	2	1.29	0	0.00	7	4.52
10	Well	1	0.65	0	0.00	1	0.65	2	1.29
11	Maybe	1	0.65	1	0.65	0	0.00	2	1.29
Total		**61**	**39.35**	**49**	**31.61**	**45**	**29.03**	**155**	**100**

(Source: Primary Data Processing)

According to Table 8, lexicalized fillers were used less frequently than unlexicalized fillers, totaling 155 occurrences across all speaking functions. The most common were 'so' (45 times or 29.03%) and 'like' (29 times or 18.71%). Rose (1998) identified lexicalized fillers as words or short phrases, such as 'you know,' 'well,' and 'so,' that serve as pause fillers without adding significant meaning. In this study, students used eleven lexicalized fillers, including 'so,' 'alright,' 'okay,' 'and,' 'you know,' 'like,' 'and then,' 'and also,' 'but,' 'well,' and 'maybe.'

The two previously presented tables indicate that participants used the highest number of fillers during speaking as transaction, with 286 occurrences consisting of 49 lexicalized and 237 unlexicalized fillers. Followed by speaking as performance with 188 occurrences (45 lexicalized and 143 unlexicalized), and speaking as interaction had the fewest, totaling 136 (61 lexicalized and 75 unlexicalized). These findings suggest that students were more likely to use fillers during transactional speaking tasks.

To explore the reasons behind the frequent use of fillers during speaking as transaction, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews. The findings revealed that participants perceived transactional speaking as a formal activity, prompting them to maintain speech fluency. This led to greater caution in their responses, resulting in pauses for thinking, which were often filled with fillers. These results align with Hassan et al. (2021), who stated that fillers assist speakers in planning their next utterance and organizing thoughts. Similarly, Juliano et al. (2022) argued that fillers in interview contexts commonly indicate hesitation, reflecting uncertainty or delay in speech production. In conclusion, fillers were most frequently used during transactional speaking tasks, such as interviews and discussions.

Additionally, analysis of Tables 4.7 and 4.8 revealed that unlexicalized fillers were used more frequently than lexicalized fillers across all three speaking functions, totaling 455 occurrences compared to 155. Among them, the filler 'ee' was the most commonly used, appearing 373 times, 54 times in speaking as interaction, 193 in speaking as transaction, and 126 in speaking as performance. To investigate this pattern further, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews to identify the reasons behind the frequent use of 'ee' by participants when speaking in English.

The analysis revealed that the frequent use of the unlexicalized filler *'ee'* in speaking was influenced by three main factors. First, unlexicalized fillers are non-lexical sounds, making them easier and quicker to produce when filling pauses. Second, participants with lower English proficiency preferred unlexicalized fillers, as these do not require grammatical processing, unlike lexicalized fillers,

which involve more cognitive effort in sentence construction. Third, mother tongue interference played a role, as the habitual use of *'ee'* in their native language during moments of hesitation was transferred into their English speech. These findings are supported by Arrasul (2002), who stated that *'uhh'* was the most frequently used unlexicalized filler among students during interviews, primarily due to ease of use and limited English proficiency. In addition, this study identified mother tongue interference as an additional factor. Irma et al., (2019) define interference as the unconscious transfer of linguistic features from the first language to the second language, while Thyab (2016) explains that such interference involves the unintentional application of native language rules or habits in the process of acquiring a target language.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of filler types indicates that students most frequently used fillers during speaking as transaction, such as interviews and discussions. This is supported by the data, which shows that among the three speaking functions, transactional speaking accounted for 286 filler occurrences, 237 (52.09%) of which were unlexicalized fillers and 49 (31.61%) were lexicalized fillers. The frequent use of fillers in this context stemmed from students perceiving transactional speaking as formal, which made them anxious about making mistakes. Consequently, they became more cautious in choosing their words, resulting in a higher use of fillers to manage pauses. Moreover, the data revealed that unlexicalized fillers were used more often than lexicalized ones, with 455 instances compared to 155. Among these, the most frequently occurring unlexicalized filler was *'ee'*, which appeared 373 times, representing 81.98% of all unlexicalized fillers used. Several factors contributed to this pattern. First, *'ee'* is a simple sound that is easy to produce. Second, it is more commonly used by learners with lower English proficiency because it does not require grammatical processing. Lastly, its frequent use was influenced by mother tongue interference, where students unconsciously transferred the habit of using *'ee'* from their native language into their English speech.

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