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File name: Filler_Utterances_of_Instructors_in_ELT_Context.pdf
File size: 197.8K
Page count: 17
Word count: 6,653
Character count: 34,929
Submission date: 11-Jul-2022 08:35AM (UTC+0700)
Submission ID: 1868904337

IDEAS

Journal of Language Teaching and Learning,
Linguistics and Literature
ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)
Volume 7, Number 2, December 2019
pp. 45 – 60

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Issued by English study program of IAIN Palopo

Filler Utterances of Instructors in ELT Context

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Received : 3 November 2018; Accepted : 28 November 2019

Abstract

This study investigated filler utterances produced by English instructors teaching a general English course considering that fillers play crucial roles in English language teaching (ELT) contexts. Data, consisting of 961 filler utterances, were collected from recorded teaching sessions conducted by female and male English instructors at the Language Institute of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The collected data, in the form of transcribed texts containing instructors' filler utterances, were examined with the discourse analysis method. The findings showed that the female instructors produced more types of fillers with the total of 639 utterances and the male ones 342. Fourteen types of phrase fillers uttered by the female instructors were as follows: *actually, alright, and then, anyway, I guess, I mean, I think, okay, right, so, well, ya (yes), you know, and you see*. Thirteen kinds of phrase fillers identified among the male instructors' utterances were *alright, and now, and then, anyway, I guess, I mean, I think, okay, right, so, well, ya (yes), and you know*. The frequently identified fillers shared benefits in terms of introducing topics, getting the students' attention, giving instructions, searching for words, and emphasizing and confirming ideas.

Keywords: discourse analysis; ELT; filler; instructor; utterance

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by Bram Barli

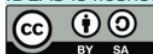
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This study investigated filler utterances produced by English instructors teaching a general English course considering that fillers play crucial roles in English language teaching (ELT) contexts. Data, consisting of 981 filler utterances, were collected from recorded teaching sessions conducted by female and male English instructors at the Language Institute of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The collected data, in the form of transcribed texts containing instructors' filler utterances, were examined with the discourse analysis method. The findings showed that the female instructors produced more types of fillers with the total of 639 utterances and the male ones 342. Fourteen types of phrase fillers uttered by the female instructors were as follows: *actually, alright, and then, anyway, I guess, I mean, I think, okay, right, so, well, ya (yes), you know, and you see*. Thirteen kinds of phrase fillers identified among the male instructors' utterances were *alright, and now, and then, anyway, I guess, I mean, I think, okay, right, so, well, ya (yes), and you know*. The frequently identified fillers shared benefits in terms of introducing topics, getting the students' attention, giving instructions, searching for words, and emphasizing and confirming ideas.

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Introduction

Instructors play essential roles in managing classroom activities and building interactions with their students (Ambrosio, Binalet, Ferrer, & Yang, 2015). They need to possess excellent speaking skills in order to convey their ideas, give instructions, and deliver the teaching-learning materials to their students. Consequently, fillers such as *okay*, *so*, *err*, *umm*, and *alright* might occur during the classroom interactions, and these utterances are considered as non-verbal communication (Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 1987; Baalen, 2001; Grice & Skinner, 2006). Such a phenomenon naturally happens due to the influence of the cognitive process of the human brain (Santos, Alarcón, & Pablo, 2016).

To some extent, the filler production phenomenon in communication might indicate speaker's disfluency (Fraundorf & Watson, 2011; Sanjaya & Nugrahani, 2018). However, hearing a disfluency can be beneficial for listeners to avoid integrating possibly erroneous ideas into an ongoing parse (Brennan & Schober, 2001). It might also make the listeners contextually ready for the upcoming words from the speaker (Corley, MacGregor, & Donaldson, 2007). In ELT context, McCarthy (1998), therefore, suggests that instructors, wishing to incorporate insights in the spoken language, should decide the status of the uttered fillers in the classroom. They need to utilize various strategies effectively in order to make their students aware of different ways of communication, either showing hesitation or incorporating meaning into what is being conveyed with words. In other words, the utterances of fillers could be a powerful tool for promoting classroom interactions since they possess special functions in terms of communication strategies (Rose, 1998).

This study investigated the filler utterances of male and female instructors teaching a general English course at a language institute in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language. This cross-gender study was conducted in order to explore the types and the frequency of fillers uttered by the two groups of instructors during the teaching-learning processes. The frequently uttered fillers shared by those two groups of instructors were, then, examined in order to identify the functions, since each filler may function differently in relation to how the instructors used them as the strategies of communication in the classroom.

Fillers in Spoken Discourse

Spoken discourse is closely identified with fillers, discourse markers, and many other phenomena in natural utterances and communication (Erten, 2014). Its examination attempts to discover patterns in communicative products and their correlations with the circumstances in which they occur (Carter, 1993;

Charismawan, 2017). In that case, the occurrence of fillers is marked by sounds, words, or phrases which appear anywhere in the sentences and that could be removed without changing the content (Baalen, 2001). Fillers serve as a break in the flow of one's speech (Yule, 2006). Thus, fillers are considered as empty items with no apparent semantic content and uncertain discourse functions (Stenström, 1994). They might occur "to mark hesitation or to hold control of a conversation while the speaker thinks what to say next" (Stenström, 1994, p. 222).

In regards to types of fillers, unlexicalized and lexicalized pauses appear to be the filler categories (Dalton & Hardcastle, 1977; Rose, 1998). Specifically, Pamolango (2016) classifies fillers into non-word fillers, phrase fillers, or silent pauses. Some examples of the non-word fillers are *umm*, *err*, and *uh*, while phrase fillers include you know, I think, well, and alright. In line with these classifications, Jay (2003) also mentions two forms of filler, namely silent and filled pauses. The filled pauses include non-word sounds such as *umm*, *err*, *ah*, and interjections, such as *well* and *say*. Connection phrases, such as *that is*, *rather*, and *I mean*, are other examples of filled pauses (Du Bois, 1974).

The utterances of fillers might have special functions (Novarretta, 2015). They are considered as collateral signals used to manage a conversation (Clark, 1996; Clark & Tree, 2002). Specifically, the utterances of fillers might help to give the speakers time to think or mentally plan what they are going to say. The effective use of fillers makes the language used livelier and personally it helps to connect the speaker's ideas to the listeners (Rose & Nilsen, 2013). In terms of meaning, Santos et al. (2016) agree that fillers do not have any particular meaning but they emphasize the meaning of the speech.

Studies of Fillers

Some studies of filler production phenomena have been conducted. For example, Pamolango (2015) investigated types and functions of fillers uttered by female teachers and lecturers in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The results showed that the teachers and the lecturers frequently produced the fillers *ya* (yes) and *okay*. Mukti and Wahyudi (2015) examined the use of filled filler *umm* by the English Department students during their oral presentations at a university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, and concluded that *umm* was frequently used in the initial position of utterances and it meant to show readiness to begin a new sentence, topic, or point of a talk, to express awkwardness, or to show respect to others. In the middle of an utterance, *umm* was used to detect a problem, to struggle, to find upcoming words, or to restart a conversation; while, in the final position, it was used as a result of agnosia or to close a talk (Mukti & Wahyudi, 2015; Tottie, 2014). Furthermore, Filipi and Wales (2003) examined the use of *okay*, *right* and *alright*. The use of *okay* indicated that the speakers wanted to continue to another topic; *right* could

¹ function to show readiness to open a new topic or to link some ideas in the conversation; and alright was commonly used to give instructions and therefore was usually found at the beginning of conversation (Filipi & Wales, 2003).

Another filler study conducted by Schachter, Christenfeld, Ravina and Bilous (1991) focused on one factor that might influence the occurrence of fillers, namely the number of potential words that somebody could draw. Interestingly, the frequency of the filled pauses uttered by lecturers of different academic disciplines also showed differences. For instance, lecturers of humanity courses produced more filled pauses during lectures than those who taught in social science subjects (Schachter, Rauscher, Christenfeld, & Crone, 1994). Referring to Schachter et al (1991), this happened because the lectures of humanity were delivered with more quantity of words and synonyms.

Despite the common perspective that fillers might influence speech delivery, the occurrence of fillers is natural and functional. The functions of fillers include cognitive function, social function and discourse-regulatory function (Garcés Conejos & Bou Franch, 2002). Specifically, fillers uttered by teachers in language teaching context might increase students' participation in learning since some fillers are intentionally used to gain students' attention, to give instructions, and to convey ideas (Garcés Conejos & Bou Franch, 2002).

Method

⁵ The study employed the descriptive qualitative approach, which enabled the researchers to analyze words and explore them into descriptions by recording the data and disseminating the findings (Elliot & Timulak, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Data were collected from recorded discourses and then were transcribed into written texts. The focus was on utterances containing fillers produced by five male and four female instructors teaching a general English course at the Language Institute of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The fillers identified were discriminated and displayed in the form of numbers in order to capture their frequency. The fillers were then divided into distinctive meaning units to be analyzed and presented in the findings section (Wertz, 1983; Rennie, Phillips & Quartaro, 1988). The overall teaching duration for each instructor was 100 minutes. The recorded teaching sessions were, then, played several times and discourses containing fillers were identified and transcribed. To calculate the frequencies of the uttered fillers, the current researchers displayed the details in a table. The types of fillers were presented alphabetically and the frequencies of the uttered fillers were classified based on the gender of the instructors. In accordance with validity of the data, the two current researchers themselves were considered as the instruments of the study. The current researchers managed all of the study processes, such as collecting the data, analyzing them, and presenting them in the findings (Pamolango, 2016).

To analyze the data and to explore the findings, discourse analysis was utilized. Discourse analysis incorporates a person's perception containing methodological and conceptual elements in order to make meaning of a discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000; Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). It examines how stretches of language, perceived in their full psychological, textual, and social context, constitute meaningfulness and unity for their users (Cook, 1989). In other words, discourse analysis describes the interrelationships between the language used by an individual in a particular context (McCarthy, 2002; Stark & Trinidad, 2007). In this study, the discourses were spoken utterances containing fillers which were transcribed into written texts. The analysis aimed to investigate the fillers frequently uttered by the male and female instructors in the context of English language teaching, specifically in a general English course. The functions of fillers frequently uttered by the instructors would be explored in order to create a meaningful understanding contextually. The results and the discussion were presented in the following section.

Results and Discussion

1. The Frequency of Fillers

Table 1 shows the kinds and the frequency of fillers uttered by male and female instructors during their teaching in the general English course. The types of fillers are listed alphabetically followed by their frequency in accordance with the gender of instructors. Referring to Table 1, both male and female instructors produced fillers in the form of phrase and sound during the classroom interactions. However, the female instructors produced more fillers than the male instructors did. The total frequency of fillers uttered by the female instructors was 639. Phrase fillers appeared to be the most frequently uttered filler among the four female instructors, with the number of 431 occurrences. There were 14 kinds of phrase fillers uttered by the female instructors, such as *actually*, *alright*, *and then*, *anyway*, *I guess*, *I mean*, *I think*, *okay*, *right*, *so*, *well*, *ya (yes)*, *you know*, and *you see*. Then, *ya (yes)* became the most frequently uttered fillers with the number of 127 occurrences, followed by *okay*, *so*, and *right* with each number of occurrences 118, 90, and 28. On the other hand, the sound fillers uttered by the female instructors also showed a high frequency with the total number of 208 occurrences. *Err* was identified as the most frequent sound filler uttered, with the number of 118 occurrences, which was followed by the frequency of the sound filler *umm* with 90 occurrences.

Table 1 The frequency of fillers

No.	Filler	Male Instructors	Female Instructors
		Frequency	Frequency
1.	Actually	0	7
2.	Alright	26	22
3.	And now	5	0
4.	And then	17	16
5.	Anyway	1	2
6.	Err	62	118
7.	I guess	1	1
8.	I mean	3	15
9.	I think	3	4
10.	Okay	49	111
11.	Right	22	28
12.	So	75	90
13.	Umm	51	90
14.	Well	5	3
15.	Ya [yes]	20	127
16.	You know	2	3
17.	You see	0	2
Total		342	639

On the other hand, the male instructors produced fewer fillers with a lower frequency than the female instructors. The total fillers uttered by the male instructors were 342, consisting of phrase and sound fillers. There were 13 kinds of phrase fillers identified among the male instructors' utterances with the total frequency of 229 occurrences. The phrase fillers were *alright*, *and now*, *and then*, *anyway*, *I guess*, *I mean*, *I think*, *okay*, *right*, *so*, *well*, *ya (yes)*, and *you know*. Among the phrase fillers identified, *so* appeared to be the most frequently uttered filler with the number of 75 occurrences. Next, the subsequent frequencies of *okay*, *alright*, and *right* appeared 49, 26, and 22 times. Like the female instructors, moreover, the male instructors uttered fewer sound fillers compared with the phrase fillers. The total frequency of sound fillers uttered by the male instructors was 113, consisting of *err* and *umm*. *Err* became the most frequently uttered sound filler among the male instructors with the number of 62 occurrences. This frequency was higher than the frequency of *umm*, which occurred 51 times.

2. The Function of Fillers

This section provides discussion of the function of fillers frequently uttered by the male and female instructors teaching a general English course. There are seven fillers examined in connection with their occurrences, namely *alright*, *err*, *okay*, *right*, *so*, *umm*, and *ya (yes)*.

2.1 Alright

Alright is classified into the phrase filler category, which was frequently uttered both by male and female instructors. It occurred 26 times among the male instructors' utterances and 22 times among the female instructors' utterances. The utterance of *alright* might function as an attention getter. Therefore, *alright* always occurred in the initial position of an utterance.

- [M#3] : **Alright**, any question in regards to the listening practice before?
- [M#4] : **Alright**, the time for discussion is up.
- [F#2] : **Alright**, I'm going to distribute these cue cards and I want you take one of them for your persuasive speech topic.
- [F#4] : **Alright**, I will give you five minutes to arrange the words into a question.

In [M#3]'s utterance, for example, *alright* was used to get students' attention. The instructor could deliver his intention in giving the students an opportunity to ask questions related to the previous listening practice. Like in [M#4]'s utterance, the use of *alright* essentially helped the instructor to get the students' attention in order to remind the students that the time allotment for the discussion session had already been over. Moreover, the use of *alright* found in [F#2]'s and [F#4]'s utterances indicated that the instructor wanted to get the students' attention since they intended to give certain directions to the students to do the classroom activities.

In addition to the function of *alright*, some were identified to help the instructors in giving instructions (Filipi & Wales, 2003). As highlighted in the following examples, the instructors gave instructions to the students to perform particular tasks. As examined in [M#1]'s and [F#3]'s utterance, the use of *alright* was followed by imperatives, while in [M#2]'s utterance, *alright* was followed by the instructor's request in the form of question. Additionally, in the [F#1]'s utterance, *alright* was used to give an instruction as well as an invitation for all students to engage in an activity, involving the instructor herself to lead the activity.

- [M#1] : **Alright**, please share your story to a friend next to you in five minutes.
- [M#2] : **Alright**, Tommy and Jane could you please read the first dialogue?
- [F#1] : **Alright**, let's review the vocabularies that you have chosen.
- [F#3] : **Alright**, please discuss with your partner about how a perfect smartphone for students should be.

2.2 Err

In this study, *err* was identified as the most frequent sound filler uttered by the male and female instructors, respectively with 62 and 118 occurrences. Basically, this filler is unintentionally uttered when a speaker is searching for words to convey their ideas (Gryc, 2014). Therefore, the more spontaneous the talk is, the more possibility to produce such kind of filler (Santos et al., 2016).

In ELT context, instructors deal with situations where classroom interactions are central. Despite the instructors' teaching preparation before the class, the findings of this study revealed the high frequency of *err* utterances due to the influence of the instructors' cognitive process to come up with words or ideas and to engage with the classroom situations (Santos et al., 2016). The following are the examples of the utterances of *err*.

- [M#2] : You may reject you friend's permission, **err** for example, 'May I turn down the AC temperature?'
- [M#3] : Based on the video, how uncontrollable is **err** the tourism sector in Barcelona?
- [F#1] : You should tell what happened to you and maybe **err** your friends can give you suggestions or motivation.
- [F#2] : They (manufacturers) change the people's perspective about **err** what the advantages that people may get so that people are attracted to buy the products.

All occurrences of *err* were found in the middle of the instructors' utterances. They meant to give the instructors time to search for words within the topic delivered. As found in [M#2]'s utterance, the production of *err* indicated that the instructor was trying to find an example of asking for permission. In [M#3]'s utterance, *err* could also be found in a question, as the instructor was trying to find an appropriate word to address the topic accurately in order to get expected answers from the students. Importantly, *err* commonly occurred before the function words rather than the content words. Therefore, it helped the instructors to connect one idea to another. As found in [F#1]'s and [F#2]'s utterance, the use of *err* aimed to connect the ideas that had previously been introduced.

2.3 Okay

Okay also became one of the phrase fillers that were frequently uttered by each group of the female and male instructors during the classroom interactions. There were 49 occurrences of *okay* identified among the male instructors' utterances and 111 occurrences among the female instructors' utterances. The occurrence of *okay* might take place in the initial or final position of the instructors' utterances. As identified it the initial position, the

utterance of *okay* might be an attention getter to set the students to be ready to follow the topics introduced by the instructors. Moreover, the use of *okay* may also indicate that a speaker intends to continue to the other topic by introducing new ideas (Filipi & Wales, 2003).

- [M#1] : **Okay**, let's discuss the exercise together.
- [M#4] : **Okay**, how many preposition of place do you know?
- [F#2] : **Okay**, now I will let you make the opening of your persuasive speech.
- [F#3] : **Okay**, we are going to watch a video the video of about the perfect smartphone for students once again.

In a certain context, *okay* could occur at the end of utterances. The function was to emphasize the instructors' ideas and to confirm whether the students had the same viewpoint as the instructors. As found in the following examples, the instructors were trying to convey their ideas, either concerning instructions for doing particular activities or delivering concepts and examples. Thus, as found in [M#1]'s and [M#3]'s utterance, the utterance of *okay* would help the instructors to emphasize the given instructions; while in [F#2]'s and [F#4]'s utterance, the emphasis would be on the concepts and the examples delivered by the instructors. Moreover, the function of *okay* in these utterances would serve as a tool to help the instructors to gain the students' responses, whether the students had already understood the instructions or the concepts and examples.

- [M#1] : After you finished interviewing one person, you can find another person to compare the results, **okay**?
- [M#3] : While watching the video, please take notes on the important information related to interrupting, **okay**?
- [F#2] : The last part is conclusion, containing a call for action and a punchline, **okay**?
- [F#4] : For example, we can use simple past tense to talk about experience, **okay**?

2.4 Right

The occurrences of *right* as one of the phrase fillers could also be found among the male and female instructors. The number of occurrences between those two groups of instructors was slightly different, in which the male instructors produced fewer *right* utterances than the female instructors. There were 22 utterances of *right* produced by the male instructors and the female instructors produced 28 utterances containing the filler *right*.

Occurring in the initial position of an utterance, *right* could function to show readiness to open a new topic (Filipi & Wales, 2003). As found in [M#2]'s utterance, the use of *right* meant to show readiness to open a new topic. [M#2] intended to build a classroom interaction in the beginning of the lesson by asking the number of students attending the class. This function, moreover, could also be found in [M#4]'s and [F#3]'s utterances, in which these two instructors were trying to show their readiness to start introducing new activities to their students. On the other hand, in [F#1]'s utterance, the use of *right* might helped the instructor to link to the previous idea stated. [F#1] found that some of her students described their unpleasant feeling through the activity of drawing and describing emoticons. Therefore, she tried to provide a suggestion, involving the utterance of *right*, to link her suggestion to the previous utterance.

- [M#2] : **Right**, how many students are in this class?
[M#4] : **Right**, I will give you ten minutes to complete Exercise our on page 51.
[F#1] : I heard some of you are feeling unhappy now. **Right**, we are here now and maybe you can find somebody who can cheer you up after you describe your sad feeling.
[F#3] : **Right**, we are going to watch a commercial video about a perfect phone for students.

Interestingly, *right* also occurred in the final position of most the instructors' utterances. The function could indicate that the instructors intended to confirm whether the students were in the same line as the instructors' point of talk. In this case, the instructors might assume that the students were familiar with the topics or ideas stated and they intended to make sure. Such functions are found in the four examples below.

- [M#1] : This activity (weekly short presentation) teaches you the ability to speak and to perform public speaking, **right**?
[M#3] : According to the video, the Barcelona's tourism sector is out of control, **right**?
[F#2] : You can just send Mr. Jonny an email for asking the feedback of your writing assignment, **right**?
[F#4] : We can see that the tense used in the text is different from Simple Present that we learned before, **right**?

2.5 So

So appeared to be the most frequently uttered filler produced by the male instructors, with 75 occurrences. On the other hand, so ranked the third most

frequent phrase filler uttered by the female instructors with 90 occurrences. This result was in line with a study conducted by Gryc (2014), revealing that *so* was noticed as one of the most frequently uttered fillers in English academic spoken activity, such as seminars and lectures. As a discourse marker, *so* could take place in the initial position of an utterance. This filler was frequently uttered by the instructors to gain students' attention as well as to introduce ideas they intended to convey.

- [M#1] : **So**, we continue to the next lesson today.
- [M#2] : **So**, who was absent on Wednesday? Raise your hand please.
- [F#3] : **So**, could you mention the positive and the negative impacts of using smartphone for children?
- [F#4] : **So**, today we will learn how to give direction.

The instructors' utterances above showed the use of *so* as an attention getter for introducing new topics or ideas. The instructors uttered *so* to gain the students' attention so that they could address their intentions. In [M#1]'s and [M#4]'s utterances, the use of *so* might help the instructors to get the students' attention because they intended to introduce new lessons. Besides, the use *so* implied in [M#2]'s utterance aimed to build classroom interactions by asking the students a question about the number of students attending the previous meeting. Moreover, *so* was uttered by [F#3] to make the students engage in the classroom activity by delivering a topic of discussion, namely the positive and negative impacts of using a smartphone for children. Furthermore, *so* was used to emphasize what the instructors intended to convey. The following are the examples of the utterances of *so* produced by the male and female instructors to emphasize their ideas.

- [M#2] : **So**, you have to perform seven-minute-drama by choosing one topic from the lesson that you have learned.
- [M#3] : **So**, on page 69 you can take a look at the example of how to interrupt people while they are speaking.
- [F#1] : **So**, do you really understand the concept of Simple Present and Simple Past?
- [F#4] : **So**, this sentence contains regular verb, and the other one contains irregular verb.

In regards to the examples above, the utterance of *so* took place in the initial position. When the utterances of *so* were eliminated from the sentences, the meaning of the utterance would remain unchanged.

2.6 Umm

Another sound filler frequently uttered by the instructors was *umm*. Its occurrences reached 51 times among the male instructors' utterances, and 90 times among the female instructors' utterances. Occurring in the initial position of an utterance, *umm* showed readiness to open a new sentence, point of talk, or topic, to express awkwardness, or to show respect to others (Tottie, 2014; Mukti & Wahyudi, 2015).

As identified in the following utterances, the use of *umm* uttered by [M#4] intended to show respect to others. [M#4] called a student's name and asked the student to follow his instruction. On the other hand, most occurrences of *so* found in the male and female instructors' utterances aimed to show readiness to start a new sentence, topic or point of talk. As identified in [F#3]'s utterances, the utterance of *umm* indicated that the instructor was trying to introduce a new sentence in the form of a question in order to ask whether the students needed to watch the video once again to complete a certain task. Moreover, in [M#1]'s and [F#2]'s utterances, *so* was used to show the instructors' readiness to open a new point of talk or topics of discussion. [M#1] pointed out that Monday was his busy day; while, [F#2] was trying to open a new topic of discussion by addressing a question to her students regarding the other examples of commercial advertisements.

- [M#1] : *Umm* basically Monday is the busiest day in a week.
[M#4] : *Umm* Donny, could you please read your sentence?
[F#2] : *Umm* can you tell me some other commercial ads that you think very catchy?
[F#3] : *Umm* do you need to watch to the video once again?

Occurring in the middle position of an utterance, *umm* was uttered to restart a conversation, to detect a problem, or to struggle to find upcoming words (Tottie, 2014; Mukti & Wahyudi, 2015). Found in [M#1]'s utterance, *umm* functioned as a sign of problem detection. The instructor felt unsure whether the students could cope with the topic delivered in which the instructor stated that the topic would be a bit heavy to discuss. On the other hand, the utterances of *umm* found in the middle position mostly indicated that the instructors struggled to find the upcoming words to address their ideas. As noticed in the following examples, [F#2] and [F#3] uttered *umm* in order to find the appropriate words to complete their statements. Furthermore, in [M#4]'s utterance, the function of *umm* might help the instructor to think about the example of using the preposition 'across from'.

- [M#3] : The last topic would be *umm* a bit heavy, that is 'beggars should be punished in developing countries'.
[M#4] : For example, *umm* Sanata Dharma University is across from the

post office.

[F#2] : Just like when you learn about stating opinion, you have **umm** reasons and facts to support your ideas.

[F#3] : I want you to propose **umm** the appropriate age for children to use smartphone.

2.7 Ya

Ya appeared to be the most frequent sound filler uttered by the female instructors, with 127 occurrences. This frequency was completely different from the number of ya utterances produced by the male instructors, namely 20 times. Despite its different frequencies, ya was considered as one of the phrase fillers frequently uttered by each group of instructors.

When occurring in the initial position of an utterance, ya might function to help the instructors to link or to introduce new ideas. As found in [M#1]'s and [M#3]'s utterances, the use of ya indicated that the instructors intended to introduce new ideas. [M#1] was trying to guide the students to deal with the sentence structure, and [M#3] introduced his role as a moderator to lead the classroom activity, namely a mini-debate session. Moreover, [F#1] tried to come up with new ideas in giving the students instructions to do a group activity. The use of ya in [F#4]'s utterance functioned to link the instructor's idea. As [F#4] invited the students to recall their past activity, the use of ya linked her previous instruction to perform a new task.

[M#1] : **Ya**, firstly you need to think about the word class, whether it is an adjective or a verb.

[M#3] : **Ya**, I will act as a moderator and I will lead your meeting.

[F#1] : **Ya**, go back to your group and start sharing with your friends.

[F#4] : **Ya**, after we recall our memory, we can share or talk about our past activity or experience.

In some cases, ya might also occur in the final position of an utterance. It functioned to help the instructors to emphasize their ideas.

[M#2] : Try to give response to your friends' requests or permission, **ya**.

[M#4] : Whatever the results of the Mid-test, just keep learning, **ya**.

[F#2] : You need to determine what you want people to change, either their attitudes or their beliefs, **ya**.

[F#3] : You should take notes on the benefits or functions of smartphone for students, **ya**.

As found in [M#2]'s utterance, *ya* was used to emphasize the instruction given regarding the response to classmates' request or permission. Moreover, the utterance of *ya* produced by [M#4] meant to put emphasis on his statement in calming his students regarding the results of the mid-test. Furthermore, the use of *ya* in [F#2]'s and [F#3]'s utterances implied that the instructors were trying to emphasize their ideas to direct the students to do the classroom activities.

Conclusion

In summary, the frequencies of fillers uttered by the male and female instructors showed a huge difference, where the male instructors used 342 fillers and the female ones 639. The types of fillers uttered by each group of instructor were classified into the phrase and sound fillers. The male instructors produced 13 kinds of phrase fillers with the total number of 229 occurrences. The most frequent sound filler identified among the male instructors was *so*, with 75 occurrences. Meanwhile, the female instructors produced 14 kinds of phrase filler with the total number of 431 occurrences. In terms of the sound fillers, the male instructors produced 113 sound filler utterances and the female ones 208. Interestingly, both male and female instructors produced *err* and *umm* as frequent sound fillers. The male instructors produced 62 utterances of *err* and 51 utterances of *umm* while the female instructors used 118 utterances of *err* and 90 utterances of *umm*.

The fillers uttered by the male and female instructors had special functions; for example, the filler *alright*, mostly occurred in the initial position, was beneficial for the instructors to gain the students' attention and to give the students instructions. The filler *err* may function as a time creating device, aiming at searching for words. Therefore, *err* occurred in the middle position of the instructors' utterances. The filler *so*, mostly in the initial position, functioned to gain the students' attention as well as to introduce new ideas or topics. Found in the middle of an utterance, *umm* was used to show the instructors' struggle to find the right words or to detect an issue. Finally, *ya* (yes) functioned to introduce the instructors' ideas.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the editors of *IDEAS: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature* and anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback and constructive comments to improve this paper.

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