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# Fillers and Their Functions in Emma Watson's Speech

*by* Bram Barli

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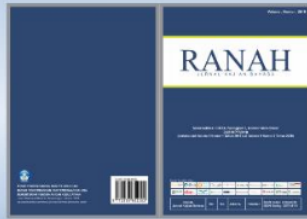
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## FILLERS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS IN EMMA WATSON'S SPEECH

*Kata Pengisi dan Fungsinya dalam Pidato Emma Watson*

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### Abstrak

*Filler* atau kata pengisi merupakan ujaran atau frase yang digunakan dalam jeda percakapan untuk menghubungkan gagasan atau ide berikutnya. Makalah ini menyelidiki jenis dan fungsi kata pengisi yang digunakan oleh Emma Watson dalam pidatonya. Para peneliti merumuskan dua permasalahan. Pertama, apa jenis kata pengisi yang digunakan dalam pidato Emma Watson? Kedua, apa fungsi dari kata pengisi dalam pidato Emma Watson? Data, yang terdiri atas 93 kata pengisi, dikumpulkan dari tiga naskah video pidato Emma Watson. Untuk menjawab kedua permasalahan dalam studi ini, para peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan analisis wacana. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Watson menggunakan dua jenis kata pengisi, yaitu jeda terisi non-leksikal (71 kali) dan jeda terisi leksikal (22 kali), serta lima fungsi kata pengisi, yaitu sebagai perangkat keragu-raguan, berempati, mengurangi efek, memperbaiki istilah, dan menambah waktu.

**Kata-kata kunci:** discourse analysis, Emma Watson's speech, filler, lexicalized filled pause

### Abstract

*Fillers* are utterances or phrases that are used in speaking to fill in the moment of silence to connect thoughts or ideas. This paper investigated the types and functions of fillers used by Emma Watson in her speeches. The researchers formulated two questions to be resolved. First, what are the types of fillers used in Emma Watson's speeches? Second, what are the functions of filler words in the speeches? Data, consisting of 93 occurrences of fillers, were collected from Emma Watson's speech scripts in three videos. To solve the research questions, the researchers used the descriptive qualitative approach and discourse analysis. Results showed that Watson used two types of fillers, namely unlexicalized filled pauses (71 occurrences) and lexical filled pauses (22 occurrences) and five functions of fillers, namely hesitating, empathizing, mitigating, editing term and time-creating devices.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, Emma Watson's speech, filler, lexicalized filled pause

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## INTRODUCTION

In a daily talk, people utter words to communicate with each other. As Swerts concluded, “A daily talk is of differences from a well-prepared lecture in many ways” (1998, p.485). Nonetheless, one of the most evident differences is that a daily talk contains disfluencies, which may be referred to as fillers. In conversations, filler words could be a moment when a speaker pauses, thinking about what she or he needs to say next without offering an impression if she or he finishes their utterances. In daily life, people often use, *er, um, ah, ehm, well, okay, I mean, you know, right, yeah*, and other similar expressions. Baalen (2001) claimed that these utterances called filler words, or simply known as fillers.

Baalen (2001) defined fillers as “sounds or words or pauses or repetitions that would seem to appear anywhere and anytime in the utterance” and may be omitted without modifying the intended messages. On the other hand, Clark and Fox Tree (2002) stated that “fillers serve as a communication function, playing a role in the speakers’ vocabulary. Fillers are not the main message; they just help to have a meaning in sentences”.

This research investigated fillers collected from video recordings of Emma Watson’s speeches in her interviews as an actress in the Harry Potter movies. Emma Watson is well-known as a British activist who had been frequently invited to be a public speaker. In practice, public speaking is one of the ways of international communication. Hasling (2006) took a similar stance, saying that public speaking is “a type of communication in which a person has the attention of many people for some period times” (see also Erten, 2014; Santos, Alarcón & Pablo, 2016). Some examples of public speaking are speeches, presentations, and lectures. In this paper, the researchers explored the speeches of Emma Watson as one of the types of public speaking.

Not only in public speaking, in the education area, fillers are also regarded as negative in speaking because they may decrease the fluency level. Hutchins (2011, as cited in Dlugan, 2011) said that “I teach a college speech class. The most common struggle my students have is the use of fillers, such as *um* and *uh*. Sometimes the students need more time in a moment of silence to connect with the next idea”. It makes their speaking ineloquent and unclear. It also makes the audience wait in a moment to get the next idea. Therefore, fillers will be distracting throughout the speech and reduce credibility if used too often. To support Hutchins’ (2011) ideas, Dlugan (2011) stated that “fillers can weaken our credibility and can indicate that we lack preparation”. Dlugan (2011) and Working (2016) also stated that fillers are unfavorable in speaking. However, some experts disagreed and said that fillers have positive aspects. Fillers have types and functions. Schiffrin and Richard (1978) said that they have various functions which depend on the situation of the speaker”. Previously, Santos, Alarcón and Pablo (2016) conducted research on fillers involving 36 foreign language teachers and Kharismawan (2017) examined the types and functions of fillers used by Barack Obama in his speeches. Irvine, Eigsti and Fein (2016) concluded that filler disfluencies as pragmatic cues. Samadian and Birjandi (2015) and Nurjain, Nurjain and Melati (2020) respectively explored fillers used by EFL learners in Iran and Indonesia. Hence, this research aims to explore further the kinds and the functions of fillers to promote awareness and knowledge of the use of fillers in speaking. Based on the research background above, the researchers formulated two questions to be resolved. First, what are the types of fillers used in Emma Watson’s speeches? Second, what are the functions of the fillers in the speeches?

## THEORETICAL BASIS

This section discusses theories that are related to the research, including similar studies conducted by other researchers. The researchers will focus on the definition, types and functions of fillers in the following.

### The Definition of Fillers

Nowadays, the term *filler* is used due to its specific meaning that describes the purpose of fillers-filling the gaps and forming the speaker's ideas. However, the fillers are not the only terms used in the literature. According to Biber, Leech and Conrad (2004, p. 449), "fillers make an important contribution to the interactive character of speech because they signal relations between the speaker, hearer(s), and discourse". For example, Biber et al. (2004, p. 449) used the label "insert", which is also acceptable but not widely used. They also stated that fillers are "peripheral to grammar" (Biber et al, 2004, p. 449). Meanwhile, Swerts stated "spontaneous speech is often a better communication means than fluent, read speech" (1998, p.486; see also Kowal, Bassett, & O'Connell, 1985; Lease & Johnson, 2006). Speakers use fillers when they are doubtful about what they should say next or they have alternatives to express their ideas and messages. However, in reality, it might also remain difficult to identify why a speaker decides to use some fillers.

Tottie (2011) said that researchers that examined fillers, such as Maclay and Osgood (1959) and Stenström (1994), conducted corpus-based studies on fillers and concluded that the fillers belonged to filled pauses". Meanwhile, Stenström (1994, p. 222) defined "fillers as lexically an empty item with uncertain discourse functions, except to fill a conversational gap". Speakers make use of filler words if they are unsure about their next utterances or there are selections for them to choose. People may experience several situations of mind, such as shyness and nervousness. Maybe these situations of mind contribute to the factors of using fillers in their utterances. In reality, it is unclear why a speaker pauses and uses filler words.

### The Types of Fillers

Stenström (1994, p. 1) stated that "fillers are categorized into two types, namely a silent pause and a filled pause", while Rose (1998) divided filled pauses into two types: unlexicalized filled pause and lexicalized filled pause. Further, Stenström (1994) said that silent pauses are pauses that appear in strategic places of the sentences; while Wu (2001) stated that silent pauses refer to the unfilled pauses when they occur in the middle of phrases and words (p. 3). As in Wu's (2001) definition, Matthei and Roeper (1983) also argued that silent pauses tend to occur within phrases of the sentence (p. 164). This statement is also supported by Brown and Yule (1983), who said that silent pauses are pauses which usually precede the utterance and help the speaker to plan the words into the utterances (p.129). They also defined silent pauses as extended pauses because they usually extend between 3.2 to 16 seconds and cause the speakers to provide sufficient information to the hearers (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 163). Filled pauses are hesitations in spontaneous speech partly or wholly taken up by a speech sound like *ah*, *err*, and *uh* (Clark & Clark, 1977, p. 561), and therefore, "pauses which are not filled with any sound or utterance are silent pauses".

Similarly, Brown and Yule (1983) defined filled pauses as gaps which usually appear in the form of sounds or words and some places of the sentence (p. 129). Moreover, filled pauses are the gaps between words and planning and thinking about what the speakers want to say (Carter, Goddard, Reah, Sanger, & Bowring, 1997, p. 201; see also Long & Ye, 2015). Based on those definitions of filled pauses, the researchers concluded that filled pauses are the gap utterances produced by a speaker when he/she plans to say something. Furthermore, Rose (1998) categorized filled pauses into two types, namely an unlexicalized filled pause and a lexicalized filled pause (p. 7). According to Rose (1998) and Baalen (2001), "unlexicalized filled pauses are non-lexemes (non-words) filled pauses which speakers use to indicate hesitation when thinking about their next messages". Baalen (2001) also gave some examples of unlexicalized filled pauses, such as *ehm*, *uh*, *err*, *ee*, *ah*, and *um*.



### Functions of Fillers

Fillers have many functions. According to Schiffman and Richard (1978), the functions of fillers “depend on the situation of the speaker.” Clark and Tree (2002) explained that “fillers helped a communicative meaning and had a place in the speakers’ vocabulary”. Further, Corley and Hartsuiker (2011) said that “deliberating fillers in the sense of communication meaning is uncertain”. So, speakers use filler words when they are uncertain about their next utterances or they have a choice to make the next utterances. This does not prove that there will be a delay with the speaker's signal in the speech due to uncertainty. Fillers have five functions, namely “mitigating, hesitating, empathizing, editing term, and time-creating devices” (Stenström, 1994; Foss & Hakes, 1978; Wu, 2001; & Baalen, 2001).

Fillers have the purpose of hesitancy procedures. Stenström (1994) concluded that “a mark of hesitation as one of the functions of fillers”. Further, Foss and Hakes (1978) stated that “they just help to have hesitations are pauses which rise in the places of a sentence when speakers have a difficult decision in using the words meaning in sentences” (p. 184). Matthei and Roeper (1983) and Wu (2001) also explained “that these fillers occur when the speaker must stop and think about what he/she will say next and when he/she is putting a sentence together”. According to Stenström (1994), “most of the filled pauses (*ee*, *em*, *err*, *uhm*, *ah* and *hm*, for example) are used as the breathing pauses, such pauses generally match semantic-syntactic boundaries” (p. 7). Therefore, filled pauses can be used as a hesitation purpose and an attention-getting device by the speakers. The speaker can use them to check the hearer’s attention to what the speaker says. Stenström (1994) stated “those fillers are defined as an invitation for the listener to be involved in what the speaker says” (pp. 64-65). The examples of fillers as an empathized purpose are *ell*, *you know*, *right* and *hey*, for instance. Jordan (2001) concluded that “filler words can be indicators used by the listeners as a response, to tell the speaker that the message is received, unclear, or understood, so the speaker knows that the listeners are giving a response to what he/she says” (p. 12). It may be hard to conclude why a speaker hesitates by using filler words.

Fillers can also function as mitigating devices. Baalen (2001) concluded that “fillers can mitigate utterances to not hurt the addressee's feelings”. She also highlighted the fillers as a commonness marker or politeness device”. Fillers like *well*, *ehm*, *eer* and *okay* can be used as mitigating or politeness devices. The elimination word is conjointly individual in every function of filler words. According to Baalen (2001), “fillers are used to correct the speech errors within the utterances’ speakers”. It means the speaker is aware of speech errors and wants to correct it. The words *I mean*, *um*, *ehm*, *uh*, *huh* and *eeh*, for example, are the indications of the speaker’s awareness of speech error which needs corrections. According to Stenström (1994), “fillers can conjointly be used as time-creating devices. These fillers give some time for the speaker to consider what to utter next”. Stenström (1994) argued that time-creating fillers are common and they are lexical repetitions” (pp. 77-78).

### RESEARCH METHOD

In this section, the researchers presented the method and data collection. This research used the descriptive qualitative approach. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) stated that in qualitative analysis, it is essential “to record information and publicizes the findings”. The researchers used discourse analysis to examine the collected data. Wood and Kroger (2000) defined discourse analysis “as a person’s perception that contains method and conceptual components”, adding that discourse information includes written and spoken texts. Moreover, Stark and Trinidad (2007) described that discourse analysis focuses on language use. Therefore, the researchers conducted discourse analysis to investigate the types and functions of fillers in Emma Watson’s speeches. The object of this research was Emma Watson’s

speeches which were taken from YouTube video transcripts. There were three videos which were used in this research, taken from Beyond Beauty project, promoting Harry Potter and “Hermione granger” on Alfonso Cuarón.

To collect data, the researchers decided to examine Watson’s speeches and the transcripts of the speeches in the three videos. Next, the researchers analyzed the videos and the transcripts by using the theories that were mentioned above. As for the data analysis technique, the researchers took three steps. First, the researchers looked for videos containing Watson’s speeches, and then identified words or sentences containing fillers in her speeches. Second, the collected fillers were then analyzed and classified into different types of fillers. Third, the classifications were discussed to determine the functions of Watson’s fillers in her speeches. Finally, the researchers drew conclusions based on the findings of the current research. To ensure that the data and analysis were acceptable and valid, the researchers checked the details and findings several times and made corrections where necessary.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the research, which consisted of two questions as follows: (1) what are the types of fillers used in Emma Watson’s speeches? and (2) what are the functions of fillers in the speeches?

### Filler Types

Based on the analysis, there were two types of filled pauses, namely unlexicalized filled pauses and lexicalized pauses. The researchers focused on the filled pauses and the classification of filled pauses was based on Rose’s (1998) theory. The categories of the fillers are presented below:

Table 1  
Types of Filler Words in Emma Watson’s Speeches

No	Filler Words	Unlexicalized Filled Paus	Lexicalized Filled Pause	Occurrence
1	Ummmm	✓		33
2	I mean		✓	2
3	You Know		✓	8
4	Well		✓	2
5	Yeah	✓		17
6	Ahh	✓		5
7	Right		✓	10
8	Hmm	✓		16
		71	22	Total: 93

Based on Rose (1998) and Baalen (2001), “unlexicalized filled pauses mean non-lexemes (non-words) filled pauses which the speakers use to indicate hesitation while the speakers think what to say next”. In other words, un-lexicalized filled pauses are the easiest sounds made while having a speaking. Below are examples (1), (2) and (3) of unlexicalized filled pauses:

- (1) Emma Watson (EW): **Um**, basically my school, **um**, got the audition please.  
(2) EW: **Hmm**, I was in the middle of third  
(3) EW: **Ah** I think I want to carry on school.

In the three examples above, the fillers **um**, **yeah** and **ah** were classified as unlexicalized filled pauses because the three utterances were non-words or non-lexical items.

According to Rose (1998), “lexicalized filled pauses are fillers in the form of words or short locutions”. In other words, lexicalized filled pauses are fillers in the form of short locutions which are mostly used when a speaker is groping for words but avoids stopping making an effort. Below are the examples (4), (5) and (6) to represent the category *lexicalized filled pause*:

- (4) EW: **I mean** this kind of uncomfortably close.  
(5) EW: **You know**, how I should do, it just tells.  
(6) EW: **Well**, it's actually like a drama lesson, really.

The fillers **I mean** and **you know** were in the form of short phrases or clauses whereas **well** was in the form of a word. The examples had their own meanings, but they were still categorized as lexicalized filled pauses. Contextually, the three lexicalized filled pauses would not change the meanings of the utterances.

### Functions of Filler Words

In this subsection, the five functions of fillers, namely hesitating, empathizing, editing term and time-creating devices, will be presented. The researchers investigated the use of filler words while considering the context of the utterances to explore the functions of fillers. The researchers used the functions of fillers based on the concepts proposed by Foss and Hakes (1978), Stenstrom (1994), Wu (2001) and Baalen (2001).

As Schiffrrin (1978) said, “filler words have many functions and have various functions that rely on the situation of the speaker”. On the other hand, Clark and Fox Tree (2002) stated that “fillers served a communicative operate and had a place within the speaker's vocabulary”. However, the speaker does not describe the main meaning in a statement. Nevertheless, Corley and Hartsuiker (2011) argued that “deliberating fillers in the sense of communication perform isn't sure”. Fillers are then used once the speaker is uncertain on how to create the connection to the next utterance or the right word selections to produce utterances.

Hesitation occurs when the speakers are in the need of utterances or when they plan to utter the next utterances. According to Rieger, “speakers do this by stretching sounds, repetition or fillers” (2003, p.41). There are some examples of fillers as a mark of hesitation, such as *err*, *uhm*, *ah*, *uh* and *hm*. In this research, fillers as hesitation devices appeared the most frequent in the examined videos. Below, (7), (8) and (9) are examples of fillers as hesitation devices:

- (7) EW: **Uhm** can you tell me how the whole Harry Potter thing came to your attention ...  
(8) EW: ... suspicious of intelligence and **hmm** and anyone that you know...  
(9) EW: ... that there's someone **eemm** that is ...

Based on the contexts above, fillers *uhm*, *hmm* and *eemm* were uttered after adding a slight pause. It means that those fillers were used to give the speaker time to think about what she/he would say next. Clark and FoxTree (2002) argued that “*um* and *uh* should be considered as integral to the information the speaker is trying to convey although they do not add to the propositional content, or primary message.”



Contrary to this, Stenström (1994, pp. 64-65) stated that fillers may be defined “as an invitation for the audience to be concerned in what the speaker says”. The following are two examples of fillers (10) and (11), functioning as an invitation:

(10) EW: **You know** one of the cracked-up pieces ...

(11) EW: ... last scene at the end with Harry and Voldemort, **right?**

Based on the two examples above, *you know* and *right* indicated whether the message was delivered and understood or not. Therefore, the researchers concluded that fillers as an empathizing device usually appeared at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

Next, Baalen (2001) proposed fillers as a solidarity marker or politeness device. It means that fillers were implied to make the speech politer. Below was an example of a filler (12) functioning as a solidarity marker:

(12) EW: Sorry this one **um well like** we're away from home...

In this case, Emma Watson (EW) uttered the phrase **um well like**, which was combined with the word **sorry**. It meant that EW showed her solidarity to the audience.

Furthermore, Baalen (2001) stated that “fillers are used to correct the speech errors within the utterances’ speakers”. The fillers *I mean*, *huh* and *ehm*, for example, may function to specify the speaker’s awareness of the speech error followed by his/her effort to correct it. Sometimes, the speaker also repeats the speech error directly. Here are two examples to represent the category:

(13) EW: ...no way **I mean** I said you guys ...

(14) EW: You are **say saying** we got ...

In example (13), **I mean** denoted to Watson’s previous sentence. By applying **I mean**, Watson would clarify her speech. Meanwhile, in example (14), Watson corrected her speech error directly.

Fillers as time-creating devices intended that fillers offer some time for the speaker to rely on what to mention next. As Stenström (1994) stated, “fillers can even be used as time-creating devices”. The following are two samples of such fillers:

(15) EW: It’s this **brilliant brilliant brilliant** what didn’t you have ...

(16) EW: oh, **is it it’s** an SS your wizard looks the curls **yeah yeah** are you a real redhead ...

The two examples in (15) and (16) above indicated there was a **single word repetition**. It means that Watson repeated the word **brilliant** three times and repeated the word **yeah** two times. The second example referred to a clause partial repetition where Watson repeated a clause (**is it it is** an SS). The two types of repetitions were intended to gain **some time to think about what to say** next. The researchers concluded that fillers as time-creating devices were almost the same with fillers as hesitating purposes. Therefore, the difference was fillers as hesitating purpose referred to unlexicalized filled pauses and time-creating devices referred to lexical filled pauses.

## CLOSING

This research **aimed to** investigate **the types and functions of fillers produced by Emma Watson** in her speeches taken from YouTube videos. The results showed that **there were two types of fillers**, namely **unlexicalized filled pauses** and **lexical filled pauses**, containing 93 filler words. It can be concluded that the 93 fillers **showed five functions, namely hesitating, empathizing, mitigating, editing term and time-creating devices**. Based on the data analysis, Watson produced more un-lexicalized filled pauses (71 occurrences) than lexicalized filled pauses (22 occurrences).

Fillers are not always considered as interruptions of speaking. Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) should understand that fillers can also become a strategy for communicating successfully. EFL learners can learn the roles of fillers and obtain more exposure on how to make use of fillers for better interactions, especially in speeches. Moreover, the findings of this research can contribute to the development of the theory of fillers in general.

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