

# EFL Students' Uses of *Um* as Fillers in Speaking

Eka Riana

English Applied Linguistics Study Program Postgraduate School  
Universitas Negeri Medan  
Medan, Indonesia  
ecka.ryana@yahoo.com

**Abstract** —This research was carried out to investigate the EFL students' uses of *um* as fillers in speaking. The objective of the research is to find out the occurrences of *um* used by EFL students in speaking. A total of ten students speaking in English based on different utterances but in the same topic were collected and analyzed, they are the students of the eighth grade at MTs Nurul Iman Telaga Jernih, Secanggang. By using Clark and Tree's (2002) framework on the use of *um*, the study shows that the filled pause of *um* played different roles based on the speaker's thoughts on feelings of uncertainty. Descriptive qualitative method was used in this research. The instrument of the research was oral test. The occurrences of *um* made by the students were 35 occurrences. The occurrences found were at the boundary (front), after the first word (middle) and later (in the last sentence). It means all the occurrences of *um* as fillers were found in this research.

**Keywords:** *um*; fillers; speaking

## I. INTRODUCTION

The status of English in Indonesia is as foreign language, not as first or second language. It means in conversation by using English, it is normal for people to use hesitation strategies, a pause or delay in performing an action or while engaging in an action. Hesitation may indicate fear, reluctance, uncertainty, or faltering, as in a speech [1]. Tree argues that some examples of hesitations are *um*, *well*, *I mean*, *you know*, and *okay*. In teaching learning process, EFL (English as Foreign Language) students tend to use *um* as filler in their speaking, such as when speaking in front of the class, the students said "...my descriptive text is *um* cat,..." Then the other students also use hesitation in telling her descriptive text, the student says "... the color of *um* my rabbit is white...". Based on the observation did in MTs Nurul Iman Secanggang, in their speaking class found this phenomenon, the students used *um* as fillers in speaking. It is important to do a research relate to this topic, because the phenomenon of using filler *um* by EFL students being the habitual in their speaking. And this research aim to find the used of *um* as filler in speaking in terms of the occurrences of *um* in EFL students speaking.

Filled pauses have attracted many researchers to investigate it either in speaking in the classroom or another location and condition. The use of *okay* and *alright* have been previously studied in the classroom of foreign students by [3]. They highlighted that *right* indicates a display of less involvement than *alright* in its use of a response token,

indicating that *right* is a more neutral marker [4]. [5] conducted a study on the use of hesitations in the EFL classroom. The research was on the use of hesitation strategies among intermediate learners of German as a second or foreign language when they participated in oral L2 tests. The research found that beginners tend to leave their hesitation pauses unfilled thus making their speech highly disfluent, while advanced L2 speakers, who are similar to native speakers, use a variety of fillers. Intermediate learners hesitate mainly for two reasons: to search for a German word or structure, or to think about the content of their utterance. Some participants use a variety of strategies to signal to the addressee that they are hesitating, while other participants leave their hesitation pauses unfilled. [6] extended the study of *um* in the social interaction context which is usually attributed to trouble in the speech production process. Through the conversation analytic investigation, he found that what is done and understood in the use of *um* depends not only on the composition and position, but also on turn-taking, action sequence and the context of talk. Other research investigating the use of *um* was conducted by [7]. He investigated social variation in the use of *um* and *uh* in the United States. This corpus study shows that "*um* is gaining currency relative to *uh*"; that is, there is a linguistic change in progress whereby the use of *um* relative to *uh* is on the rise". It is also argued that comprehensive understanding of "the dynamics of gender and filler usage" urges us to examine "the meanings and associations of *um* and *uh* and of speakers' stances, objectives, in relation to their social world". All related findings above support this research, in terms of investigated the using *um* as filler in speaking by EFL students.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

*Uh* and *um* have long been called filled pauses in contrast to silent pauses. The unstated assumption is that they are pauses (not words) that are filled with sound (not silence). Yet it has long been recognized that *uh* and *um* are not on a par with silent pauses. In one view, they are symptoms of certain problems in speaking. In a second view, they are non-linguistic signals for dealing with certain problems in speaking. And in a third view, they are linguistic signals – in particular, words of English. If *uh* and *um* are words, as we will argue, it is misleading to call them filled pauses. To be neutral and yet retain a bit of their history, we will call them fillers [8].

Filled pauses are use in speaking by the speaker, especially for EFL students in speaking by using English. The Occurrences of the filled pauses also in variation location, especially for filled pause *um*, the occurrences of filled pause *um* in several location. According to [2], the occurrences of *um* are divided in to three location:

At the Boundary (Front).

The occurrences of *um* is in the first location of a sentence. It means to start a conversation, the speaker say the filled pause *um* first.

Eg: *um*, you will be the first now.

From the example above, the occurrences of filled pause *um* is at the boundary or in front of the sentence. [2] argue that the first occurrence of *um* may just be because of a delay or disfluency, this research discovered that when the speaker uses *um* in the beginning of the speech, it is because the speaker is ready to speak.

After the First Word ( In the Middle)

The Occurrences at after the first word means the use of filled pause *um* is located in the next after the first word in a sentence uttered.

Eg: think *um* that you want to say...

From the example above, the occurrences of *um* is in the middle or after the first word uttered by the speaker. In this case, the speaker applied a restart after a filled pause. Sometimes a speaker will utter a few words and then suddenly return to the beginning and say the same words [2].

Later ( in the last sentence)

The last location based on Clark and Tree is later or in the last sentence.

Eg: that all about my presentation *um* thank you.

When *um* is uttered in the last sentence, which is also mentioned by [2], it is usually used as an indication to point out an object or may be the cause of the occurrence of *um* in the last sentence shows that *um* does not mean anything - it is just a delay to fill the gap before closing a sentence.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive qualitative study based on [2] theoretical and analytical frameworks. The consideration of using [2] is that EFL students speaking in some way have the dimension of spontaneous speech in which Clark and Tree (2002) investigated. A total of ten students' utterances were collected from a class, consisting of the eight grade students, studying in Mts Nurul Iman, Langkat, Indonesia. To collect the students' utterances, a mobile phone used to record the utterances by using voice recorder application. The electronic device was used to record the voices of the students as well as to pick up clear speeches. The advantages of using this recorder were that it did not disturb the learning process, and it could be used for other classroom activities if needed. The utterances of the students containing the filled pause *um* were then transcribed. After transcribed the utterances relate to the used of *um* as filler in speaking, the data were displayed and

analyzed in terms of the occurrences of *um*, determine the occurrences of *um* based on [2] theory.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

At the Boundary (Front).

The occurrences of *um* is in the first location of a sentence. It means to start a conversation, the speaker say the filled pause *um* first [2].

Data 1

*Um* the color of it skin is grey, black and white.

Data 1 shows the occurrences of *um* is at the boundary (front). This occurrences occurred by subject 6, when the subject uttered "*Um* the color of it skin is grey, black and white." filled pause *um* occurred at the front of the sentence. So the occurrence located at the boundary (front) has been occurred in this data.

Data 2

*Um* I like my dog so much.

Data 2 shows the occurrences of *um* is at the boundary (front). This occurrences occurred by subject 7, when the subject uttered "*Um* I like my dog so much." filled pause *um* occurred at the front of the sentence. So the occurrence located at the boundary (front) has been occurred in this data.

After the First Word (Middle)

The Occurrences at after the first word means the use of filled pause *um* is located in the next after the first word in a sentence uttered [2].

Data 3

Tiger *um* has long tail.

Data 3 shows the occurrences of *um* is after the first word. This occurrences occurred by subject 8, when the subject uttered "Tiger *um* has long tail." filled pause *um* occurred after the first word "Tiger" then continue to another word "has long tail". So, the occurrence at after the first word (Middle) has been occurred in this data.

Data 4

Chicken has *um* short and smooth tail.

Data 4 shows the occurrences of *um* is after the first word. This occurrences occurred by subject 10, when the subject uttered "Chicken has *um* short and smooth tail.." filled pause *um* occurred after the first word "Chicken has" then continue to another word "short and smooth tail". So, the occurrence at after the first word (Middle) has been occurred in this data.

Later ( In The Last Sentence)

The last location based on Clark and Tree is later or in the last sentence [2].

Data 5

Chicken has wings, but chicken cannot fly high *um*.

Data 5 shows the occurrences of *um* is in later (in the last sentence). This occurrence occurred by subject 10, when the subject uttered “Chicken has wings, but chicken cannot fly high *um*” filled pause *um* occurred later (in the last sentence) So, the occurrence at later (in the last sentence) has been occurred in this data.

#### Data 6

Dolphin has long mouth *um*.

Data 6 shows the occurrences of *um* is in later (in the last sentence). This occurrence occurred by subject 9, when the subject uttered “Dolphin has long mouth *um*.” filled pause *um* occurred later (in the last sentence) So, the occurrence at later (in the last sentence) has been occurred in this data.

Filled pauses are use in speaking by the speaker, especially for EFL students in speaking by using English. The Occurrences of the filled pauses also in variation location, especially for filled pause *um*, the occurrences of filled pause *um* in several location. According to [2], the occurrences of *um* are divided in to three locations: at the boundary (front), after the first word (middle) and later (in the last sentence).

From the observation conducted of ten students in the classroom, it was found that all location of *um* in the theory stated by [1]. The utterance uttered by the subjects was analyzed based on the theory as a temporary category of data analysis to answer the problem of the occurrences of the *um* occurred in classroom being observed in the matrix below:

Table 1. The Occurrences of *Um* as Fillers

Subjects Initial	At the Boundary (Front)	After the First Word (Middle)	Later (In the Last Sentence)
DR	1	2	-
LK	1	2	-
AFR	1	1	1
ER	-	2	2
DNA	1	1	1
DDM	2	-	1
RA	2	2	1
MGI	1	1	1
DN	0	2	2
NL	1	1	2
Total	10	14	11

From the table above, it is found that the dominant occurrences of *um* as filler is after the first word (middle). The percentage of the occurrences after the first word (middle) used by all the subjects is 40%. The percentage of occurrences in later (in the last sentence) used is 31.42%. The lowest percentage of the occurrences of *um* as fillers used is at the boundary (front), it is 28.58%.

In the data analysis, it was found that the occurrences of *um* in three location, they are: At the boundary (front), after

the first word (in the middle) and later( in the last sentence). The occurrences o f *um* as fillers at the boundary (front) show that the filled pause *um* can appear in the first word before express another word. The occurrences of *um* as fillers occurred after the first word (middle) to give a filled pause after the first word then continue with other word. The occurrences of *um* as fillers occurred in later (in the last sentence) occurred just to give a brief delay which contain nothing.

## V. CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data, the conclusion can be drawn that the three locations of occurrences *um* as fillers, namely at the boundary of fluent speaking (front), after the first word (middle) and later (in the last sentence) according theory of [2] are discovered in the process of speaking of the students at grade eight in MTs Nurul Iman Secanggang. Among these three occurrences of *um* as fillers, the dominant location of occurrences occurred by the subjects is after the first word (middle). It happens because the students often used *um* as filler between first words to continue the next word.

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