



INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF FILLER SOUND IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Filler sounds, such as “um”, “uh”, and “you know”, are common in spoken communication and play a dual role as both facilitators and barriers to effective communication. This study investigates the effects of filler sounds on communication effectiveness, focusing on audience perceptions and the pragmatic functions of these linguistic elements. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to university. This findings reveal that filler sounds serve crucial pragmatic functions, such as providing thinking time, maintaining conversational flow, and signaling hesitation. However, their impact varies depending on the context. While filler sounds are more accepted in informal settings as markers of relatability, they are perceived as distracting or unprofessional in formal context. Most respondents (82.8%) agreed that reducing filler sounds enhances a speaker's confidence and credibility. Additionally, responses indicate that moderate use of filler sounds can support conversational naturalness, but excessive use undermines clarity and message delivery. By analyzing the interplay between speaker intent, audience interpretation, and contextual factors, this study contributes to the understanding of filler sounds in communication. The findings provide insight into how speakers can adapt their use of filler sounds to enhance message clarity and audience engagement, particularly in multicultural or professional environments.

Keywords: *Filler sounds, Effective communication, Audience Perception*

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, serving as a means to exchange ideas, strengthen relationships, and build mutual understanding. In oral communication, fluency and coherence of speech are often considered indicators of a speaker's competence and authority. But natural language is not perfect. “um”, “uh”, “you know”, “how”, etc. are paused, fluctuating, and the sound of filler. These language elements are often recognized as speech breaks and drawbacks, but they play a more complicated role in communication.

The field of phlegmatic filler sound is placed as a marker for discussing several functions. They may indicate hesitation, signal cognitive effort, or act as conversational tools to maintain the speaker's flow in a dialogue (Clark Fox Tree, 2002). Moreover, filler sound is often used unconsciously as speakers manage the cognitive demands of formulating coherent messages while simultaneously interacting with their audience. Despite their pragmatic utility, the overuse of filler sounds may create negative perceptions among listeners, leading to judgments of the speaker as less confident, prepared, or professional (Erten, 2014).

Research has extensively documented the implications of filler sounds in various context. Studies such as “Breakfast breaks used by students in the micro lesson class” indicate how these elements affect the recognition of the master’s degree in speakers and efficiency. Similarly, the use of fees in the proposal of the dissertation indicates that excessive dependence on the sound of charging can affect the clarity and professionalism of the speaker message. On the other hand, Clark and Wasow (1998) argue that filler sounds serve important cognitive functions by providing speakers with additional time to process information and by signaling to listeners that the speaker has not yet completed his or her turn.

Despite these findings, there remains a significant gap in understanding the dual nature of filler sounds as both facilitators and inhibitors of effective communication. While some scholars argue that filler sounds serve functional and pragmatic purposes, others highlight their potential to disrupt the flow of speech and alienate audiences. This dichotomy raises important questions: Are filler sounds inherently detrimental to communication, or can they enhance the listener’s understanding of a speaker’s message under specific circumstances? Furthermore, how does the context (e.g. formal or informal context) affect the perception and impact of filler sounds?

This study aims to investigate the effect of filler sounds on effective communication by analysing the impact of filler sounds on audience perception and message comprehension. Based on pragmatic theory and supported by empirical data from audience surveys, this study aims to clarify the subtle role of filler sounds in spoken language. By examining complex interplay between a speaker intention, listener interpretation and contextual factors, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying effective communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of filling sounds such as “um”, “uh”, “emm”, etc. is an essential part of conversation communication, but its role in effective communication remains in discussion. Scientists have studied the functions, perceptions, and effects of these vocal rests and provided a detailed understanding of value in various context. This review synthesizes existing research to establish a foundation for analyzing the effect of filler sounds on communication effectiveness.

Cultural Identity

When we think about filler sounds like “um”, “uh”, or “you know”, they might seem like simple pauses in speech, but their meaning and impact are often shaped by cultural norms and values. These sounds don’t just serve a linguistic function; they also reflect the cultural identity of the speaker and their approach to communicate. By understanding how different cultures perceive and use filler sounds, we can better grasp their role in effective communication.

In Western cultures, like in the United States or the United Kingdom, filler sounds are often considered a natural part of everyday speech. According to Clark and Fox Tree (2002), these sounds help speakers process their thoughts while keeping their turn in a conversation. However, in more formal settings, frequent use of filler sounds can be seen

as a lack of preparation or confidence. This reflects cultural values that prioritize directness and professionalism, especially in public speaking or professional communication.

In contrast, other cultures interpret filler sounds differently. For example, in Japanese culture, pauses and filler sounds might indicate thoughtfulness or respect, as the speaker carefully chooses their words to avoid offending others. This aligns with the high-context nature of Japanese communication, where subtle cues are just as important as the spoken words. On the other hand, in cultures like Germany, where precision and structure are highly valued, filler sounds may be viewed negatively, signaling a lack of clarity or preparation.

Based on my questionnaire findings, participants shared similar perspectives. While filler sounds were recognized for their role in maintaining the flow of conversation, their acceptability often depended on the context. In informal settings, these sounds were seen as natural and even relatable. However, in formal situations, excessive filler sounds were more likely to be perceived as unprofessional or distracting. This reflects how cultural and situational factors shape our perceptions of what makes communication effective.

This exploration of filler sounds through the lens of cultural identity has taught me that these small elements of speech carry much more significance than I initially realized. They are deeply tied to how different societies approach communication, whether through directness, subtlety, or respect for the listener. As someone interested in effective communication, I believe it's crucial to understand these cultural nuances. Adapting how we use filler sounds based on the expectations of our audience can make our messages clearer and help us connect better with people from different backgrounds.

In the end, filler sounds are more than just pauses in our speech—they are cultural markers that reveal how we think, speak, and connect with one another. By acknowledging their role in communication, especially in multicultural contexts, we can use them more intentionally to enhance understanding and foster meaningful interactions.

Functions of Filler Sounds

Filler sounds are often considered linguistic tools that help speakers manage cognitive and social demands during communication. According to Clark and Fox Tree (2002), these sounds act as hesitation cues, allowing speakers to organize their thoughts and maintain the flow of speech without losing turns. McRae and Osgood (1959) emphasized the functional aspect of filler sounds and described them as placeholders that allow speakers to move efficiently between pauses in speech. This view highlights their practical value in ensuring smoother interactions.

Audience Perception of Filler Sounds

Filler sounds are functional, but their perception by listeners can vary widely depending on the context. Tottie (2011) found that filler sounds are more acceptable in informal settings where conversational norms are more relaxed. However, in a formal or professional context, they are often perceived as signs of nervousness, unpreparedness, or incompetence. Bosker et al. (2014) argued that frequent use of filler sounds can undermine listener interest and reduce the speaker's credibility, especially when clarity and expertise are required. Filler sound and communication effect

The relationship between the sound of the filler and the effectiveness of communication was an important direction in recent studies. Bortfeld et al. (2001) suggest that the moderate use of filler sounds can give the listener clues about the speaker's thought process and facilitate comprehension, however, excessive use can be distracting and make comprehension difficult. This duality reflects the delicate balance that the speakers must maintain so that the message is clear and attractive.

Research space

Existing studies are studying the functions and perceptions of sound filling, but there are limited research on how they affect the effectiveness of communication in real world scenarios. The interaction between filler sounds and listeners' perceptions, especially across different cultural and contextual settings, remains understudied. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the extent to which filler sounds affect audience perceptions and communication outcomes in a range of situations.

The existing body of literature underscores the dual nature of filler sounds— they are both functional tools and potential obstacles in effective communication. By analyzing the pragmatic and perceptual dimensions of filler sounds, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of their role in spoken interactions.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach to studying the influence of fillers on effective communication. A quantitative descriptive method was chosen, since it allows you to study the phenomenon in its natural context in depth, which allows you to understand in detail the perception and experience of participants (Sandelowski, 2000). This research focuses on understanding how filler sounds such as “um,” “uh,” and “like” are used by speakers and perceived by their audiences in various communication settings.

The study began with the distribution of a structured questionnaire designed to gather preliminary data about participants' perceptions of filler sounds. This survey served as a starting point for understanding broader patterns and themes, which were then explored in more detail through qualitative data analysis. The questions aimed to discover how participants rated the role of filler sounds in communication, whether these sounds were helpful, neutral or distracting, and what specific function they serve in maintaining the flow of the conversation. Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling in order to select people with direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Respondents included people from a variety of backgrounds, including university students, educators, and professionals who regularly engage with and evaluate oral communication. The sampling strategy provided both the speakers and the audience outlook, and guaranteed to provide a comprehensive view of this phenomenon.

After the questionnaire was collected and analyzed to identify the repeated models, the quality data has become abundant by studying the open answers provided by the participants. Responses were categorized based on recurring themes such as the frequency of filler sounds, the contexts in which they appeared, and their perceived impact on message clarity and speaker credibility. For example, many respondents noted that filler sounds could signal uncertainty, but could also serve as a tool to maintain the speaker's turn in the conversation. To analyze the data, this study used the theme analysis proposed

by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method has enabled systematic identification of the main themes from the answers of the participants. The first step was to read through the open-ended survey responses several times to become familiar with the data. The data was then coded to capture specific ideas and feelings associated with the use of filler sounds. For example, codes such as “natural flow,” “distraction,” and “authenticity” were applied to parts of the text that expressed these emotions.

The next step in the analysis was to group the codes into broader themes. For example, the theme “functions of filler sounds” covered several codes related to how filler sounds help speakers manage cognitive load, signal indecision, or maintain control of the conversation. Another theme, “perceived effectiveness,” included codes describing how filler sounds influence the audience’s perception of the speaker’s competence and overall message clarity. The final stage of analysis involved interpreting these themes in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks in pragmatics. For example, conversation management theory and pragmatic markers were used to explain why some participants viewed filler sounds as a natural part of oral communication, whereas others viewed filler sounds as a sign of lack of preparation or fluency. Ethical considerations were carefully considered throughout the study: participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Written consent was obtained from all participants and data was anonymised to protect participants’ identities during analysis. The findings of this study aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the dual role that ‘filler sounds’ play in effective communication – both as practical tools to facilitate smooth conversational flow and as potential obstacles that, if overused, can hinder audience engagement. By exploring these complexities, this study provides insight into how small linguistic features can have a big impact on the dynamics of human interaction, contributing to ongoing debates in pragmatics and communication studies. This qualitative and descriptive approach ensures that the study is firmly grounded in the lived experiences of participants, while providing a rich, detailed description of how filler sounds function in different communication contexts. It is hoped that insights gained from this study will be useful for both academic discourse and practical communication strategies, particularly for those involved in public speaking and other forms of oral communication

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Instrument

Primary research instrument employed in this study was a questionnaire designed to gather participants’ perceptions and experiences related to the use of filler sounds in spoken communication. The questionnaire aimed to explore how filler sounds influence audience perceptions and their impact on communication effectiveness, aligning with the study’s objective to investigate the dual role of these linguistic features. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions with a binary response format (Yes/No) to ensure simplicity and clarity in data collection. This format allowed participants to provide straightforward answers, which were later analyzed for recurring patterns and themes.

The responses were analyzed quantitatively to identify trends and proportions within the dataset. The Yes/No format allowed for straightforward categorization, enabling the researcher to calculate percentages and interpret findings efficiently. The results were

further contextualized by linking them to themes derived from previous studies, such as the pragmatic functions of filler sounds (Clark & Fox Tree, 2002) and their impact on audience perceptions (Tottie, 2011).

The use of filling sound, such as “um”, “uh”, and “emm”, is an essential part, but it is often ignored in human communication. In this study, we will investigate the effects of effective communication and analyze public awareness collected using detailed questionnaires. The results reveal both functional and perceptual aspects of filler sounds, highlighting their subtle role in speech interaction and connecting with existing research in the field.

General Perception and Use of Filler Sounds

The majority of respondents (96.6%) perceived background sounds to be a common feature of communication, with 89.7% admitting to regularly using background sounds in their conversations. The conclusion is that it supports the utilization of filler, agreeing to the Clark and Fox Tree (2002) declaration, and the pause of these voices is a natural element of human discourse. They function as a tool for controlling cognitive load and indecision of signals, helping to maintain a familiar flow. Perception of Filler Sounds Despite their prevalence, audience perceptions are divided: Nearly half of respondents (48.3%) said they are not bothered by filler sounds, especially in informal situations. However, 51.7% find them a bit distracting, especially in formal or professional environments. This supports Totti's (2011) observation that the acceptability of sound bite sounds is situation dependent, with formal settings requiring greater precision and professionalism. When the respondent asks the reason for using filling sound, he identifies his role in the time reflected by the maximum group (48.3 %), then normal use (31 %) and tension (13.8 %). Continued. These results comply with the vision of Maclay and Osgood (1959). In this case, filling sound often appears as a cognitive strategy so that speakers can organize their thoughts without losing conversation. Impact on communication effectiveness.

The results show that filler sounds can influence how speakers are perceived. A significant number of respondents (75.9%) believe that excessive use of filler sounds could affect their perception of the speaker's confidence and competence. BOSKER et al. (2014) has discovered that disability containing sound may confuse listener commitments and reduce speakers' reliability. However, the study also found a degree of tolerance for these sounds, with many respondents acknowledging their practical function in keeping the conversation flowing. When asked to rate the impact of filler sounds on communication effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 10, responses ranged from moderate to high, with the most common ratings being 5 (27.6%), 8 (20.7%) and 7 (17.2%). This indicates that Sound Fill is not essentially harmful, but those excess or inappropriate use can hinder communication, distract the listeners, and reduce the authority of the author.

Context and Recommendations

Respondents have shown that filling sounds is more frequently used in unofficial conversations (41.4 %) compared to formal parameters (17.2 %). The variation in this context emphasizes the importance of adapting to the general public and the situation. In

accordance with this, 82.8 % of the respondents thought that the decrease in the use of filling to increase the confidence and effect of the speakers. Based on these findings, speakers should strive to be mindful of their use of filler sounds, especially in formal or sensitive situations where clarity and professionalism are paramount. While these sounds serve a practical purpose, consciously reducing their frequency can improve message delivery and audience engagement. Relationship to previous research the findings of this study build on the work of Clark and Fox Tree (2002) and Totti (2011) and provide further evidence that filler sounds are a double-edged sword in communication: they can be both functional and potentially disruptive, depending on the context and the listener's expectations. Furthermore, the findings contribute to a broader understanding of language disorders in pragmatic and sociolinguistic research and highlight their role in shaping communication dynamics.

In conclusion, the study highlights the need for speakers to find a balance between their natural speaking patterns and the expectations of their audience. Recognizing double roles fees, this study provides valuable information on effect on effective communication and provides practical results to improve oral interaction under various condition.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study emphasize the dual nature of filler sounds in spoken communication. They function as both pragmatic tools to manage cognitive load and conversational flow and as potential barriers to effective communication when overused. The questionnaire responses revealed that most participants are aware of and frequently use filler sounds in their daily conversations. While some respondents recognize their utility in providing thinking time and maintaining the natural rhythm of speech, others perceive them as distractions, particularly in formal settings.

The results also Indicate that the context of communication significantly influences the perception of filler sounds. Informal conversations tend to tolerate their use more than formal situations, where professionalism and clarity are paramount. Moreover, the majority of respondents believe that reducing filler sounds enhances speaker credibility and effectiveness, aligning with existing research that highlights the importance of minimizing disfluencies in professional settings (Bosker et al., 2014; Tottie, 2011).

This study contributes to the broader understanding of filler sounds by exploring their impact on communication from both the speaker's and the audience's perspectives. By addressing their dual role as facilitators and inhibitors, it underscores the importance of context and balance in their use. These findings hold practical implications for educators, public speakers, and professionals aiming to optimize their verbal communication strategies.

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