

Fillers as Communication Strategies Among English Second Language Speakers in Job Interviews

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Received: September 30, 2021

Accepted: November 2, 2021

Online Published: November 18, 2021

doi:10.5539/ijel.v12n1p30

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v12n1p30>

Abstract

Good mastery of English in job interviews does not only give an added value to the second language (L2) interview candidates but also increases the chances to be employed. However, not all English as Second Language (ESL) speakers are competent in using the language. In this regard, communication strategies (CS) are useful for L2 speakers in overcoming the difficulties in communicating their intended messages. The objective of this study is to examine the use of fillers as CS by interviewing candidates of academic staff recruitment at Universiti Teknologi MARA Machang, Kelantan, in Malaysia. The data of this qualitative study were obtained from observations through video-recorded oral interactions between candidates and panellists during interview sessions. The NVivo software (version 12) was used to help the researcher in analysing the oral data. The results revealed that the use of fillers stipulated in Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of CS was extensively used by ESL speakers in real job interviews as a processing time pressure-related strategy when the speaker was trying to fill in the gaps between their limited resources and message conveyance in L2. In conclusion, fillers are useful to L2 speakers by helping them to maintain conversations and prevent communication breakdown.

Keywords: academic staff recruitment interviews, communication strategies, ESL speakers, use of fillers

1. Introduction

Communication is a vital skill involving information transfer and receiving messages between two parties. In job interviews, candidates' language proficiency is mostly demonstrated by their oral communicative skills in interactions with the interview panellists. The majority of job interviews are conducted in English. In Malaysia, research by Ting, Marzuki, Chuah, Misieng and Jerome (2017) shows that the excessive unemployment rate is regularly caused by the candidates' low usage and understanding of the English language. Most interview panellists make quick judgements based on their impressions of the candidates, including their use of English (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). Krishnan, Ramalingam, Ching and Maruthai (2017) contend that most graduates fail to impress employers because they are unable to comprehend even the most basic interview questions. Even candidates with excellent academic qualifications might not be able to perform well during interviews due to limited oral competence in the language. Answering interview questions in English is often perceived as a big challenge by potential employees in Malaysia (Yusof & Mohamad, 2018). They do not only lack command of English as a tool of communication, but also fail to recognise the necessity of effective communication.

Having a good command of English is an added value to interview candidates. For the candidates to be able to sell their skills and experience in job interviews, they need effective oral skills and competence in using the language. Despite this, many ESL speakers cite the language barrier as a critical issue (Iliyas, 2014). This is consistent with Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) who assert that although most Malaysian graduates have been exposed to the English language since primary school, creating sentences and speaking in the language is still a big challenge for them. This situation indicates the low English language proficiency level among Malaysian graduates which will affect their chances to be employed. In this regard, Clokie and Fourie (2016) and Ting et al. (2017), who studied employers' perspectives on the value of English proficiency and communication skills among graduates seeking jobs in Malaysia's private sector, reported that potential employers considered language proficiency and communication skills as being essential for job employability. Besides, the findings also suggested that effective communication skills not only can improve employability but also their career

growth prospects.

1.1 Studies on Communication Related to Job Interviews

Current graduates are facing greater hurdles and competition compared to previous batches. Since communication skills are an important aspect of employability, graduates who lack such skills struggle to meet work demands and professional standards in today's fast-changing and global working environments (Noor, Tab, & Kamarulzaman, 2017). Krishnan, Ching, Ramalingam and Maruthai (2019) studied the relevance of communication skills for employment in Malaysia and sought to discuss employer expectations in-depth by using communication theory. Their research findings revealed that the majority of recent graduates had poor communication abilities in terms of clarity, completeness, conciseness, and correctness. In this regard, some employers negatively commented on the graduates' oral communication skills. This is consistent with the study by Jaemjadrio, Dispany, Tantanapornchai and Charunrochana (2015) in Thailand. They investigated the communication issues that typically arose when using English as a medium of communication during job interviews. The interviews were conducted by inviting university students to virtual job interviews with a foreign employer using English as the medium of communication. The findings revealed that the participants faced some difficulties using the English language when responding to the interview questions. This happened because the participants struggled with their comprehension of the language. The participants also stated that complicated questions, the interviewers' accent, and speaking speed were the common issues that caused them to be unable to understand and answer the questions.

In addition, candidates' lack of competency in using the English language also hinder their ability to showcase their ideas, knowledge, and skills. Additionally, Kuen, Rafiq-Galea and Heng (2017) contend that the intended message may not be transmitted due to a lack of language resources and inadequate strategic and sociolinguistic competencies, which could lead to a communication failure. Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig and Philip (2019) add that candidates who possess limited English oral communication skills might miss the opportunity to be hired.

Despite that, with the use of some strategies, L2 speakers might have the chance to communicate their intended messages despite their lack of competency in the language. These strategies, known as communication strategies (CS), have been cited as being useful in communication as highlighted by several researchers including Adid (2020), Karpati (2017), Kuen et al. (2017), Mahardhika, Rukmini, Faridi and Mujiyanto (2019), Maldonado (2016), Manzano (2018), Mahmud (2017), Permana, Sofyan and Kasmains (2019), and Zulkurnain and Kaur (2014). Some of the strategies are restructuring sentences, guessing, and the use of all-purpose words and fillers to fill in the communication gap.

1.2 Studies on Oral Communication Strategies in the Malaysian Context

With English taking the position as a second language in the country, Malaysia offers rich data for studies on communication strategies, particularly among the Malays who have been believed to be the least receptive to the use of English (Abdullah & Eng, 2017). Concerning this, Savignon (1983, p. 43) asserts that success in communication relies heavily on L2 speakers' "ability to communicate in a restricted way by employing strategies". Such strategies, known as communication strategies (CS), are expected to be used by L2 speakers in tackling various communication problems in conveying their intended messages and thoughts to others (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 179).

Some researchers have been conducted on oral communication strategies in the Malaysian context. These include a study by Kuen et al. (2017), who investigated the effects of oral CS instruction on ESL learners' oral communicative performance and their strategic competence. The respondents consisted of 88 Malay ESL speakers from two polytechnics in the central and southern zones of Malaysia. The treatment involved 12 weeks of training using oral communication strategies, such as circumlocution, appeal for help, clarification request, fillers, comprehension check, confirmation checks, self-repair, and topic avoidance among two groups, namely the control group and the experimental group. The instruments such as oral proficiency test, oral communication test, transcripts of oral communication test, unstructured interview, and self-report were used to collect the data. The findings revealed that after the training, the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly, and the learners' self-reports also indicated positive results. The literal translation was the most used CS in their conversation.

Another study on the use of oral CS was conducted by Kaizhu (2016). Her study was conducted to investigate the most frequently used oral CS and the relationship between oral English language proficiency by pre-university Malaysian Chinese students in a matriculation college in Selangor, Malaysia. The Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006) was used. A descriptive analysis, involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used to obtain the data. The findings revealed that

message reduction and alteration strategies were the most frequently used CS. These were followed by non-verbal strategies, social affective strategies, fluency-oriented strategies, and negotiation for meaning strategies used in higher usage. Meanwhile, accuracy-oriented strategies, attempt to think in English strategies and message abandonment strategies were used moderately. To examine the relationship between two variables, Spearman's correlation coefficients were used and the results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between oral CS used with the participants' oral proficiency. Showing respect to listeners, helping people to understand better, and allowing the participants to express themselves freely were among the reasons for their use of CS.

The findings above are consistent with the study by Idrus (2016) in identifying the CS used by undergraduate students when delivering oral presentations. This study also used the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) developed by Nakatani (2006) to identify the strategies used when delivering their oral presentations. The strategies were divided into two categories based on the grades obtained in an oral communication skills course. The students who scored A were considered good presenters, whereas students who scored B were considered average presenters. Based on the analysis, the results portrayed that good presenters used more oral CS compared to average presenters. To cope with speaking difficulties, good presenters used more social affective, fluency-oriented, and non-verbal strategies, whereas average students used social effective and non-verbal strategies to a considerably smaller extent.

The studies above revealed the same function of CS, which is to solve an emerging communication problem, but their data were mostly gathered from non-real communication contexts such as giving students simulated tasks that require them to perform communicative activities in the classrooms. Unlike these studies, the current study is particularly interested to examine how CS is used by ESL speakers in a real communication context, specifically academic staff recruitment interviews. Among various types of CS that might be used by the interview candidates, this study is interested to examine the use of fillers, mainly because they occur in a vast amount in conversations as stated by Richards and Schmidt (2013).

1.3 Communication Strategies

In terms of communication, L2 speakers often face difficulties in expressing themselves due to their limited mastery of the target language (Hedge, 2001). Concerning this, Lafford (2004, p. 204) contends that insufficient competence in the target language has caused a "communication gap" which refers to "an interruption in the normal flow of conversational interaction between the speaker and the interlocutor owing to a breakdown in communication". In this situation, the use of CS would help L2 speakers to convey their intended messages and remain in the conversation until their goals have been achieved. This is supported by Ahmed and Pawar (2018), stating that CS plays an integral role in language acquisition. As for speakers who are not aware of CS, they might face difficulties in communication due to a lack of linguistics knowledge.

In terms of the use of fillers, which is the focus of this study, Kharismawan (2017) states that L2 speakers should be made aware that it works in holding the conversation while the speaker thinks of what to say next. Unlike other types of CS, which help L2 speakers to clarify their messages, fillers are used to retain interlocutors' attention on the subject matter being talked about.

Despite the importance of CS in creating successful communication, not much is known on how the speakers have used the strategies in communication. Particularly on the use of fillers, Erten (2014) states that in daily talks by native or non-native speakers, fillers always exist and it is nearly impossible to discover a speaker who does not use any fillers at all while speaking (Khojastehrad, 2012). Considering that, a speaker's usage of fillers is normal in speaking (Stevani, Sudarsono, & Supardi, 2018) and that they appear regularly in most conversations (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). This study is interested to look into more detail on the use of fillers by ESL speakers in real job interviews.

1.4 The Origins Concept of CS

The term "communication strategy" (CS) was firstly proposed by Selinker (1972). This term was originally concerned with the linguistic aspects of the psychology of L2 learning. An early definition of CS, therefore, revolved around the use of L2 speakers to communicate their ideas when facing a communication gap caused by performance variables or insufficient competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). This notion became popular in the 1970s, resulting in the emergence of many CS scholars, such as Bialystok (1983), Faerch and Kasper (1983), Poulisse (1990), and Tarone (1977, 1980, 1981), who proposed their perspectives on CS.

With the inclusion of these scholars' viewpoints, Dörnyei and Scott's taxonomy of CS (1997) has become a "holistic" and more comprehensive taxonomy than others. Hence, it has been chosen as a basis for the data

analysis of this study. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) contend that the traditional conceptualisation of CS, which refers to insufficient language resources, is insufficient to capture its meaning. Thus, it is advocated that CS relates to the means to deal with a broader variety of L2 communication issues. This is an operational definition of CS in the current study.

Dörnyei and Scott (1997) argue that one of the most prevalent problems that learners confront is a lack of time to deliver their messages in the target language. Thus, fillers are regularly used by speakers to gain more time to think and find appropriate words and structures (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002; Clark & Wasow, 1998; Dörnyei, 1995). Since one of the L2 speakers' communication issues is lack of processing time, Dörnyei (1995) proposes an extension to the definition of CS stalling strategies (e.g., the use of lexicalised pause-fillers and hesitation gambits) that helps speakers to gain time to think. Here, fillers are used to fill in the gaps in communication when the speakers search for the right words in the target language. As illustrated in Table 1, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) propose 40 strategies, and the use of fillers is part of them.

Table 1. Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of CS

Categories of Dörnyei and Scott's taxonomy	Communication Strategies
Direct strategies:	
Resource deficit-related strategies	Message abandonment Message reduction Message replacement Circumlocution Approximation Use of all-purpose words Word-coinage Restructuring Literal translation Foreignising Code switching Use of similar sounding words Mumbling Omission Retrieval Mime
Own-performance problem-related strategies	Self-rephrasing Self-repair
Other-performance problem-related strategies	Other-repairs
Interactional strategies:	
Resource deficit-related strategies	Appeals for help Direct appeal for help Indirect appeal for help
Own-performance problem-related strategies	Comprehension check Own-accuracy check
Other-performance problem-related strategies	Asking for repetition Asking for clarification Asking for confirmation Guessing Expressing non-understanding Interpretive summary Responses Repeat Repair Rephrase Expand Confirm Reject
Processing time pressure related-strategies	Use of fillers Repetitions Self-repetitions Other-repetitions
Own-performance problem-related strategies	Verbal strategy markers
Other-performance problem-related strategies	Feigning understanding

Source: Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 197.

In this taxonomy, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) separate the main categories into three, which are direct, interactional, and indirect. These categories are then separated into sub-categories based on the types of communication problems, namely resource deficit-related (gaps in speakers' knowledge that prohibit them successfully from verbalising their messages), own performance problem-related (the realisation that what has been said by the speakers is incorrect or partly correct), other performance problem-related (refer to something in the interlocutors' speech that is deemed problematic), and processing time pressure-related (relate to the situation in which a speaker needs additional time to process and prepare L2 speech. Hence, fillers are placed under the sub-category of processing time-pressure related under the main category of indirect strategy.

1.5 Types of Fillers as Communication Strategies

Fillers and hesitations are commonly used by many in conversation to indicate the need for a word or simply to plan their utterances. According to Santos, Alarcon, and Pablo (2016), fillers are the presence of a cognitive process in a speaker's mind, indicating that the thinking process can result in speech production. Fillers are also known as "commonly occurring in the aspect of natural speech in which pauses or hesitations emerge in the middle of the utterances" (Santos et al., 2016, p. 192). In addition, as contended by Erten (2014), speakers are likely to use words like "well", "I mean", "actually", "you know", and "let me think" during oral interactions to fill in pauses that allow them to continue the conversation in difficult times. Baalen (2001) defines fillers as sounds, words, or phrases that may appear anywhere in the speech and could be removed without affecting the content. It is crucial to notice that the use of fillers does not always imply that the speaker intends to delay. This delay may occur even while they are looking for a term, trying to remember a word or expression, or trying to gain time while doing verbal planning. This means that fillers are used to provide the impression that "there's more to come" (Lomotey, 2021).

According to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), fillers are used to fill pauses, to stall, and to gain time to keep the communication channel open and maintain discourse at times of difficulty. According to Dörnyei and Scott (1997), the two types of fillers are lexicalised pause fillers and hesitation gambits. Lexicalised pause fillers come in the form of short structures such as "well", "actually", and "okay". Hesitation gambits come in the form of sounds such as "aaa", "erm", and "emm". These, from Faerch and Kasper's (1983, p. 215) perspective, are known as non-lexicalised fillers. Similarly, Dalton and Hardcastle (1977), Kharismawan (2017), Lomotey (2021), and Rose (1998) also use the term non-lexicalised fillers for non-word sounds such as "umm", "err", and "ah". Concerning the function of fillers, lexicalised fillers and hesitation gambits have no significant meaning in the sentence although the former is usually uttered consciously while the latter might occur without speakers' consciousness (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). Nevertheless, they both fill in the gaps that suddenly occur in the conversation when the speaker has to take a little pause to think about what to say next before continuing with the speech.

This study aims to expose to learners that fillers can be used as one of the strategies in oral interactions. Fillers are a strategy that aids ESL speakers not only by giving them time to think about what they are going to say next, but also helping them in processing and planning L2 speech in natural communication. In addition, educators can also make learners aware that fillers are useful in maintaining conversations.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to obtain a more detailed description of the candidates investigated. Merriam (1998, p. 6) states that the purpose of qualitative research is to identify, describe, and explain the "meaning inherent in people's experiences". Therefore, the researcher used the qualitative method in this study to investigate, comprehend, and describe the use of fillers in respondents' speech in the context of real job interviews.

2.2 Location and Participants

The respondents of this study were Malay ESL speakers who attended academic staff recruitment interviews to select permanent and part-time lecturers. The study took place at UiTM Machang Campus in Kelantan, Malaysia. Being Malaysia's largest public institution, UiTM represents the majority of Malays who speak English as a second language.

As stated in the job advertisement, Ph.D. holders were highly preferred for the post, especially for the permanent post. The candidates were selected at two interview phases; mock teaching and final interview. Since the mock interview did not involve interactions with the interview panellists, the data were gathered only from the final interview. Among the criteria to be considered in selecting successful candidates was good English proficiency.

The study involved 19 academic staff candidates to be selected for three faculties namely the Faculty of Art and Design (FSSR), the Faculty of Information Management (IM), and the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS). Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted physically and online; whichever was convenient to the candidates as well as the campus. One FSSR candidate attended a face-to-face interview, while the other five joined online interviews via Cisco Webex. As for IM, all five candidates who attended were called in for online interviews, also using Cisco Webex. Meanwhile, five candidates from ACIS attended face-to-face interviews and another three joined online interviews using Cisco Webex. All candidates were Malays. They were chosen as the respondents of the study since the Malays are believed to be the least receptive to the use of English (Abdullah & Eng, 2017), and hence, their ability to communicate in English has become a real concern of many studies, including the current study.

During the interview sessions, the panellists comprised the Rector of the campus, the Deputy Rector of Academic Affairs, and the Heads of the three faculties mentioned earlier. They were all physically placed in a meeting room to evaluate the candidates. Meanwhile, three Deans from the respective faculties joined the interview sessions virtually from the UiTM Shah Alam campus, giving a total of eight panellists.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Before conducting observations on job interviews, the data collection procedure began by getting written approval from the Research Ethics Committee and the Rector of UiTM Kelantan, Malaysia. Following the granted approval, arrangements were made with the Assistant Registrar of the campus to allow the researcher to observe all interview sessions on the dates to be determined by the campus. Before the interview sessions, consent to participate in the research was obtained from the interview candidates and panellists.

During the interview sessions, the researcher was allowed to be in the meeting room and sat together with the interview panellists to carry out the observations on the use of fillers by the interview candidates. However, the researcher was positioned at the end of the table not to disrupt the interview process. This enabled the researcher to observe and view the investigated interview at a close range. While doing this, the researcher was helped by the media technician in charge to record the sessions. The recording would help her in analysing the data later on.

Upon completion of the interview sessions, there were a total of nine video recordings capturing 19 candidates being interviewed with a different number of candidates in each video. Out of this number, 8 video recordings were analysed since video 6 contained no interview sessions but only interactions among panellists.

2.4 Instruments

As mentioned earlier, the recordings of the interview sessions greatly helped the researcher in analysing the data. Based on the recordings containing L2 oral interactions between staff recruitment interview candidates and the panellists, data analysis was conducted to investigate the use of fillers as CS by the former.

2.5 Data Analysis

The main focus of data analysis was to examine the use of fillers by ESL speakers attending academic staff recruitment interviews conducted in L2. Following the completion of the data collection process, the video recordings were analysed using NVivo software (version 12). Although the software did not help the researcher to analyse the data, it helped in managing the data more systematically. As a result, the researcher was able to systematically identify and classify the types of fillers used by candidates based on Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) perspective of CS.

The first stage of analysing the data was the coding process. This started by importing the video data into the NVivo software (version 12), followed by viewing the video recordings and identifying any occurrences of fillers among the candidates. At this point, the use of digital recording helped the researcher to easily locate at which point of the interactions involving the use of fillers.

Once fillers were identified, the oral data were transcribed for further data analysis and descriptions. To enhance the accuracy of the transcription, the digital recording was played back and forth in small segments to ensure that no pertinent data would be missed out. The oral data were scrutinised and analysed individually.

By adopting thematic analysis based on Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of CS, fillers were placed under the theme of processing time pressure-related strategy, which indicated that a speaker needed additional time to process and prepare L2 speech. From the different types of fillers identified from the data, the researcher constructed three different codes to cater to the three types of fillers, namely lexicalised pause fillers, hesitation gambits, and a combination of both.

For data confidentiality, all 19 candidates examined were given pseudonym. Respondent 1 was labelled as “(R1)” followed by other candidates up until the last candidate who was labelled as “(R19)”. Similarly, the first interview panellist was labelled as “IP1” and the number continued until “IP8” for the eighth panellist.

2.6 Data Reliability and Validity

The reliability of research findings was addressed by the use of NVivo software (version 12) which allowed the researcher to manage the classifications of fillers more systematically. Meanwhile, based on the results of the study, the validity of the research findings on the classifications of fillers was enhanced by verifications made by interrater. Two interraters were involved. As stated by Liao et al. (2010), two interraters should be sufficient.

3. Results and Discussion

This section contains the excerpts of the oral data related to the use of fillers by the respondents in this study based on Dörnyei and Scott’s perspective of CS (1997). The results showed that fillers were extensively used by the ESL speakers during the interview sessions with 388 occurrences and they can either be lexicalised pause fillers, hesitation gambits, or a combination of both. While the former referred to the form of short structures such as “well”, “actually”, and “okay”, the latter referred to the form of “aaa”, “erm”, and “emm”.

Table 2. Frequency of the types of fillers used by the candidates in real job interviews

Types of fillers	Frequency
Lexicalized pause fillers	23
Hesitation gambits	299
Lexicalized pause fillers and hesitation gambits	66
Total	388

Table 2 shows the occurrence of fillers according to their types. Out of 388 occurrences of fillers in the interactions, 23 are lexicalised pause fillers, meanwhile, 299 are hesitation gambits. The remaining 66 occurrences are a combination of both. The following excerpts are the examples of the transcribed data in their verbatim form which show the use of different types of fillers by the interview candidates.

3.1 Lexicalised Pause Fillers

<Files\\Video 1> (at the beginning of the sentence)

IP1: So, can you share with us your about your research area?

R3: **Basically**, I’m doing my Ph.D. in a...in a teaching and learning engagement in a public university.

<Files\\Video 2> (at the end of the sentence)

IP4: What is your specialised...specialised area?

R2: I do specialise in advertising, from illustrating the design, or making a video in a television commercial show **okay...that’s it**.

<Files\\Video 3> (in the middle of the sentence)

IP3: Can you tell us about your teaching background?

R6: I have lots more education experience which is more than 10 years with the other education **okay...but** I want to go to another established university which is the UiTM. That is number one.

As clearly seen in video 1, video 2, and video 3, candidates used lexicalised pause fillers. This type of fillers kept the communication channel open regardless of the position the strategy was used in the sentence. In this case, uttering the words “basically” and “okay” was the candidates’ strategy to take time and figure out what to say next. The candidates took some time to respond to the interview panellists before they continued with their next utterances.

3.2 Hesitation Gambits

<Files\\Video 2> (in the middle of the sentence)

IP1: Can you share with us how you conduct Online Distance Learning (ODL) classes during this pandemic?

R1: What I’m doing right now in this situation as an academician, **emm...I** using several platforms which is **emm...I** encourage my students **aaa...to** using some of the digital platform that we connect some a YouTube, which we can change our fast learning outcome and then their objectives of the learning that suitable with...with

the subject.

<Files\\Video 3> (*at the beginning of the sentence*)

IP1: Do you have any published paper?

R6: **Aaa...**not yet for the time being

As illustrated in the excerpts taken from videos 2 and 3, the candidates used simple sounds such as “aaa” and “emm” in their utterances. These words were just sounds without any particular meaning and were used by the candidates to fill in the gaps to gain some time at times of difficulty while keeping the communication going. As stated by Khojastehrad (2012, p. 10), when a speaker wants to “buy time” during their speech, they use phrases like “ehm, uhm,” and these are the characteristics of natural and unscripted speech. In addition, the occurrence of hesitation gambits indicates that the speaker does not give up but keeps trying in giving their responses.

3.3 Lexicalised Pause Fillers and Hesitation Gambits

<Files\\Video 5>

IP3: If you are selected for this position, can you share with us, what you like and dislike about teaching?

R11: **Okay...aaa...**what I dislike **err...**sorry what I like and dislike about teaching. **Okay...**I like to **aaa...**share my knowledge to my students and **aaa...**I believe I can give more value and advantage to UiTM Kelantan especially to my faculty. And **aaa...**I also can share experience and get **err...**information with other lecturers also.

As in the above excerpt taken from video 5, the candidate used both lexicalised pause fillers and hesitation gambits in delivering the intended messages. As stated by Dörnyei and Scott (1997, p. 190), the use of lexicalised pause filler keeps the communication channel open, and hesitation gambits sustain dialogue to gain time at the time of difficulty. In addition, Dörnyei (1995) contends that the time-gaining strategy differs from other types of CS as it is not used to compensate linguistic deficiency, but to acquire time and to preserve the communication channel open at times of difficulty. In addition, Santos et al. (2016, p. 199) assert that the use of fillers is not about the common use in the oral strategy, but the use of it signals the interlocutor to not “steal” the floor when the speaker has not finished her/his turn.

4. Conclusion

Since English is the most important language in job interviews, it is a need for candidates to master the language. However, for L2 speakers who have problems in delivering their intended messages in the target language, the use of CS will be of great help. The use of fillers, particularly, helps speakers to think of what to say next or even rearrange their thoughts before they speak.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that fillers, lexicalised pause fillers, or hesitation gambits, are extensively used by L2 speakers in delivering their intended messages particularly in the context of real job interviews. They are a useful strategy for the speakers to hold the floor when they think or hesitate during their speech. Since fillers can occur consciously or unconsciously (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997), they are a common type of CS used by L2 speakers during oral interactions. Being able to engage in a conversation is deemed necessary among L2 candidates in job interviews and fillers are one of the strategies that they can use to improve their speaking ability as fillers help to sustain conversations and prevent communication breakdown.

Unlike other types of CS which are teachable, teaching fillers to learners seems not possible or purposeful since they can occur unconsciously (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). This is parallel to Lomotey (2021) who states that teaching fillers in the classroom cannot be overstated, and this could be due to the same reason, which is fillers might occur unconsciously.

The use of fillers is one of the useful strategies in oral interaction so that learners will put in the utmost effort to speak in the target language, which will benefit them in the future by increasing their chances of employment. While educators could expose L2 speakers to lexicalised pause fillers, they need to be wary of the high occurrence of hesitation gambits which can be irritating to the interlocutors. As Lomotey (2021) puts it, there are times when overuse of fillers attracts negativity since it tends to reduce fluency.

To conclude, fillers are not troublesome but they reveal the speaker’s cognitive processing and aid in the management of problems and the avoidance of communication issues. They are, after all, a common characteristic of natural speech, filling in the gaps that arise during the production of speech. As a result, they provide a significant contribution to speech and signal relationships between the speaker, the listener, and the discourse (Biber, Conrad, & Cortes, 2004).

In conclusion, as seen in this study, L2 candidates would attempt to speak in the target language when the situation requires it. However, as highlighted in the earlier part of this study, many are said to fall short of expectations, resulting in many unfavourable comments about Malaysian graduates. As a result of their exposure to the use of fillers, Malaysian graduates are hoped to be able to sustain their conversation by holding the floor for a short while when they are not able to proceed with their conversation. As contented by Lomotey (2021), fillers have been shown to aid fluency rather than hinder it. Therefore, it is hoped that our graduates could sustain their conversations with the panellists throughout interviews, hence, increasing the chances of being employed.

4.1 Recommendations for Future Research

In conducting the current study, it has been discovered that there are two aspects in this study that could be improved. It is expected that more impactful results would be obtained.

First, as the respondents of this study are limited to only 19 respondents, who participated in job interview sessions at the time of the investigation, it is suggested that future research increases the number of respondents to provide more support from a larger scale of the study, encompassing numerous levels and respondents.

The second recommendation for future research relates to the candidates' cultural background, the Malays, described as being least receptive to the use of English (Abdullah & Eng, 2017), and the use of this language is especially low among them (Ting, Mahathir, & Li, 2011). Since the use of fillers is extensively used in the current study, it will be interesting to investigate if the same results will be obtained from L2 speakers of different ethnic groups and higher proficiency levels.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, for the financial support granted under the FRGS/1/2019/SS09/UITM/02/11.

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