The Use of Filled Pauses in Monologue by Thai Learners of English with Different English Language Proficiency Levels

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งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบประเภท ตำแหน่ง และหน้าที่ของคำเติมช่วง เงียบที่ปรากฏในการพูดบรรยายเดี่ยว โดยศึกษาในกลุ่มผู้พูดที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในระดับอิสระและ ระดับพื้นฐาน ข้อมูลของคำเติมช่วงเงียบได้วิเคราะห์จากการพูดเล่าเรื่องตามหัวข้อที่กำหนด จากผล การศึกษาพบว่าผู้พูดในกลุ่มที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในระดับพื้นฐาน ใช้คำเติมช่วงเงียบที่เป็นเสียงในอัตราที่สูง ในขณะเดียวกันคำเติมช่วงเงียบที่เป็นคำในภาษาอังกฤษปรากฏเป็นจำนวนมากในกลุ่มผู้พูดที่ใช้ ภาษาอังกฤษในระดับอิสระ ในเรื่องตำแหน่งปรากฏพบว่า คำเติมช่วงเงียบปรากฏทั้งที่ขอบเขตตอนพากย์ และภายในอนุพากย์ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าคำเติมช่วงเงียบส่วนใหญ่ถูกใช้ในการเรียบเรียงคำพูด

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Abstract

This research study was set out to compare filled pauses used in spontaneous speech by Thai learners of English with independent and basic user levels of English language proficiency in terms of types, distributions and functions. The data consisted of filled pauses produced in spontaneous speech. The results show that non-lexical filled pauses were produced most frequency among the speakers with basic user level, while lexical filled pauses in English were used oftentimes by the independent user group. The distributions of filled pauses were found both before and within clauses. Throughout this study, a major function of filled pauses was organization.

Keywords: Filled pauses, English language proficiency levels, Speaking skill

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1. Introduction

Fluency is an important skill needed in study of English language. Fluency had been defined as the automaticity in processing speech (Lekwilai, 2014) and the capacity to speak smoothly and flow (Brumfit, 1979; Shen, 2013; Yuan, 2014). During speech, the English learners are different from the native speakers in terms of fluency. In general, speech produced by native speakers of English is fluent because they were born speaking the language (Gao, 2001; Mendis, 2015). The study conducted by Guz (2015) on the relationship between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) speech fluency in Polish learners of English found that their performances in L2 speech is slow and disturbed by filled pauses and silent pauses in comparison to L1. Guz (2015) pointed out that the non-native speakers of English are likely to produce disfluency such as filled pauses while speaking English.

In continuous speech, people pause in order to breathe or to think about what they are going to say, resulting in a filled pause. Filled pauses are pointed out by many scholars as speech devices which assist the speakers to plan their speech, to organize appropriate words to say as well as to maintain the floor during utterance (Watanabe & Ishi, 2000; Benus, 2013). Panichkul (2003) stated that the processing of pauses or filled pauses are natural and appear in all languages. Maclay and Osgood (1959) pointed out that filled pauses are produced as a 'conversational ball' which help the speakers to take control of the floor and at the same time to organize thoughts or ideas in speech. If the speakers pause for too long during speech, they are likely to lose control of discussion to another speaker. Thus, filled pauses were used as a signal that the speakers just paused to think, but had not finish talking.

Rose (1998) pointed out that there are two types of filled pauses which occurred in speaking; they are non-lexical filled pauses (filler sounds) and lexical filled pauses (filler words). Non-lexical filled pauses are non-verbal utterances such as "Ah", "Uh", "Um", "Oh". Lexical filled pauses are words such as "You know", "I mean", "Okay" and so on. Filled pauses occur in everyday speech, but they have no semantic meaning in a sentence (Spieler, 2015). Erard (2004) pointed out that filled pauses can be seen used in other languages. He stated that people from different countries have filled pauses in their own language. For instances, "Este" in Spanish, "Ano", "Eto" and "E" in Japanese. The distribution of filled pauses found by previous

studies occurred at syntactic boundaries (e.g., before clause, before phrase) and at non-syntactic boundary (i.e., within clause) (Boomer, 1965; Cook, 1971; Cook, Smith & Lalljee, 1974; Watanabe & Ishi, 2000; Panichkul, 2003; Watanabe, Den, Hirose & Minematsu, 2004). The speakers producing filled pauses before clauses are likely organizing a large unit of their speech, while filled pauses occurring within clauses may indicate that the speakers are organizing a small unit in speech, or to introduce and correct utterance.

Whenever the speakers are concerned with their utterances or talk about difficult topics, they seem to expand the number of filled pauses (Rochester, 1973). The overuse of filled pauses in speech might indicate the speakers' lack of English knowledge and low level of English language proficiency (Lauttamus, Nerbonne & Wiersma, 2010). Filled pauses are an important factor in evaluating speech fluency as they can be an indicator of proficiency level in the L2 (Iwashita, Brown, McNamara & O'Hagan, 2008).

Therefore, the production of filled pauses (lexical or non-lexical) in speech may attest to speakers' English language proficiency level. This study has been conducted to compare filled pauses used among speakers with independent and basic user level in terms of types, distributions and functions of filled pauses. To achieve the study on comparing the production of filled pauses, the present study hypothesized the following points.

1. The number of filled pauses is expected to be higher in the group with basic user level than the group with independent user level of English language proficiency.

2. The Thai learners of English in the independent user group are likely to produce lexical filled pauses more frequently than non-lexical filled pauses compared to the basic user group.

3. Filled pauses produced by the Thai learners of English in the independent user group will occur more before clauses than within clauses in comparison to the basic user group.

4. The Thai learners of English in the basic user group will produce filled pauses as correction more than the independent user group.

2. Research Objectives

The present study aims to compare types, distributions and functions of filled pauses produced by students with different levels of English language proficiency.

3. Research Questions

The main research questions are as follows:

- Which filled pauses (lexical and non-lexical) are likely to be produced most frequently among Thai learners of English with independent and basic user level of English language proficiency?
- What are the distributions and functions of filled pauses in speakers with different level of English language proficiency?

4. Methodology

In this study, IELTs practice test by British Council was employed in order to select qualifying participants. The IELTs results in each overall band score were converted to align with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in order to determine independent and basic users. The participants who have IELTs band scores with 5.5 or higher were grouped as independent users while participants with scores of 4.0 or lower were allocated to basic user group. The participants with band scores 4.5 – 5.0 were left out in order to establish a recognizable separation of skill level between the two groups. The selected participants were twenty Thai students who are attending Mae Fah Luang University at the undergraduate level. Ten students were categorized in independent user group and another ten student were grouped in basic user group.

Questions during a face-to-face interview were used as an instrument to collect filled pauses data in spontaneous speech produced by the participants. The interview topics were composed of talking about oneself, talking about a movie that they liked and reasons why, something that has made them really happy and the reasons why they chose to study at Mae Fah Luang University. Each participant was asked to describe the same topics in face-to-face

interview. Before starting the face-to-face interview, the participants were informed about the interview topics as well as the guidelines on what they could talk about in order to elicit long length of speech. This step was necessary as some participants initially kept quiet or had no idea about what to say. The voice recording was processed during the face-to-face interview.

4.1 Data Analysis

The participants' voice recordings in face-to-face interview were transcribed into text for analysis of filled pauses data in terms of types, distributions and functions.

4.1.1 The Analysis of Filled Pause Types in Spontaneous Speech

After the voice recordings were transcribed, both types of filled pauses (non-lexical and lexical) produced in spontaneous speech were marked. The sorting of filled pauses in this study consists of sound in non-lexical filled pauses (e.g., "Ah", "Uh", "Um", "Hmm", "Aha") and lexical filled pauses in English ("Yes", "Yeah", "Okay", "Like", "I mean", "How to say"), and Thai (e.g., "Baeb" (แบบ), "Laew" (แล้ว), "Eoey" (เอ๊ย). Lexical filled pauses both in English and Thai can be interpreted as overlapping with discourse markers. However, the present study found the use of lexical filled pauses distinguished from discourse markers. Throughout the present study, lexical filled pauses in English and Thai were used with purpose in order to fill pauses in monologue speech. This differs from the use of discourse markers because lexical filled pauses were used anywhere in the stream of speech which indicated hesitation or buying time while thinking of what to say next. While, the use of discourse markers shows that the speakers negotiate their thoughts in conversation or signal their laziness and carelessness in speech (Swerts, 1998; Erten, 2014). To clarify the analysis of filled pause types, some examples are illustrated below.

(1) [*Ah*] [The movie that I like] // [I like cartoon.] [It's name Lion King]

(2) [*Yeah*] // [My favorite thing is music]

(3) [We travel [*Eoey*] // we // go to the Disneyland]

Examples (1) - (3) illustrate both non-lexical and lexical filled pauses produced in spontaneous speech by Thai learners of English with a different level of English language proficiency. Example (1) shows that the speaker produced non-lexical filled pause sounds "Ah"

in order to fill the pause in utterance. Examples (2) and (3) illustrate that the speakers produced lexical filled pauses which are English words ("Yeah") and Thai ("Eoey" เอ๊ย) in their speech.

4.1.2 The Analysis of Filled Pause Distributions in Spontaneous Speech

The distributions of filled pauses were analyzed based on content and where filled pauses occur at syntactic positions in monologue speech as proposed by Panichkul (2003). They are filled pauses at syntactic boundaries (e.g., clauses boundaries, before phrases) and non-syntactic boundary (i.e., within clauses). In this study, the distributions of filled pauses were located with regard to overall structure and the content. The analysis of the level on which filled pauses occur was proceeded, e.g., at clauses, phrases and within clauses. However, clauses were determined as the larger unit as mentioned in Panichkul (2003). In this study, the unit of clause was considered as consisting of subject and predicate. In previous studies, the cooperation of silent pauses in front of filled pauses in a position before clauses, before phrases were considered as before syntactic boundaries (Swerts, Wichmann & Beun, 1996; Sook Ahn, Lancker-Sidtis & Sidtis, 2014). The symbol (//) in examples taken from the voice recorded transcription indicate the silent pause or unfilled pause produced in monologue speech by Thai learners of English. The analysis of filled pause distributed before clauses are illustrated in the following examples.

(4) [I like cartoon] [It's name Lion King] // [*Yeah*] [I watch it many many times since I was young]

(5) [*Ah*] // [There are many things that make me happy,] [but // the recent... the recently // *Ah* last two months I went to Australia.] [So, it's the best time of my life.]

(6) [*Ah*] [The movie, // I like Shawshank Redemption]

Examples (4) - (6) exhibit distributions of filled pauses before clauses. The speakers produced filled pauses at this position when starting a new clause. Example (4) shows the co-occurrence of silent pause with filled pause which is consistent with previously mentioned studies. The present study also discloses that speakers sometimes began a clause with a filled pause followed by a silent pause as illustrated in example (5) or without a silent pause in

example (6). Filled pauses are also produced without a silent pause between two clauses. This occurrence is considered as a position between clauses as illustrated in example (7) below.

(7) [Now, I'm studying // *Ah* in school of nursing] [*Yes*] [and my favorite subject is biology]

Example (7) displays filled pauses in a position between clauses. There is a filled pause produced without a silent pause located between clauses. In present study, filled pause was also found in position before phrase as shown in example (8).

(8) [I... I like W] [It's just *Ah* drama Korean] // [*Um*] [How many time?] *Uh* // [More than more

than ten times]

Example (8) shows filled pause occurrence before phrase. In this position, filled pause is distributed before a noun phrase. Moreover, the distributions of filled pauses in syntactic positions were not only found before clause, but between clauses, before phrase, and also after clause as shown in example (9).

(9) [While, I'm eating I feel really really happy // and after eating I feel really really happy,]

[but // *Yeah* I don't know why too,] [but it could be anything could be the dessert or meal

anything just eating] // [*Yeah*]

Example (9) shows a filled pause distributed in a position after clause. Filled pause at this position occurred when the speakers completed a clause. In the present study, the distributions of filled pauses were also found at non-syntactic boundary, i.e., within clause as illustrated in example (10).

(10) [I like to read [*Ah*] cartoon book]

Example (10) demonstrates a filled pause distributed within a clause. Filled pause occurring at this position can be located anywhere within a clause area which is categorized as within clause.

4.1.3 The Analysis of Filled pause Functions and distributions in Spontaneous Speech

Panichkul (2003) and Benus (2013) had pointed out that filled pauses occurring at clause boundaries and within clauses indicate that the speaker organized speech as large and small units, respectively. Filled pauses function as correction when the speaker produced wrong words or uncompleted clause then abandon it and reproduced a new clause. Benus (2013) also proposed that filled pauses function as introduction when the speaker produced them to signal that the upcoming information is worth paying attention to. In the present study, filled pauses occurring after clauses in did not find accordant to any functions mentioned in the previous studies above. During this study filled pauses occurring after clauses were lexical filled pauses "Yes" and "Yeah". Castro (2009) explained that "Yes" and "Yeah" were used in dialogue to help the speakers confirm or express understanding. Since filled pauses data in the present study were collected in monologues speech, filled pauses "Yes" and "Yeah" were considered as the speakers' confirmation of their own understanding. The functions and distributions shown in Table 1, proposed by Panichkul (2003) and Benus (2013) are used as research tools in this study.

Function		Distribution
Organization (Panichkul, 2003; Benus, 2013)	Filled pauses as organizing speech or recalling words	- Between clauses - Before clause - Before phrase - Within clause
Correction (Panichkul, 2003)	Filled pauses as correcting the mistakes in speech	- Within clause
Introduction (Benus, 2013)	Filled pauses as introducer	- Within clause
Confirmation (Castro, 2009)	Filled pauses as confirming understand	- After clause

Table 1. Functions and Distributions of Filled Pauses Proposed by Previous Studies (Panichkul, 2003, Castro, 2009; Benus, 2013)

Table 1 displays distributions and functions proposed by Panichkul (2003), Castro (2009) and Benus (2013) are used as research tools to analyze functions of filled pauses in the present study. The analysis of filled pauses functions is dependent on distributions in which the filled pauses are produced. For instance, filled pauses distributed to syntactic position (e.g., between clauses, before clause, before phrase) indicate that speaker is organizing the speech.

Filled pauses occurring after clauses were defined as confirmation, with speakers employing them in order to confirm their statement or understanding. Filled pauses within clauses were categorized as organization, correction or introduction. Filled pauses were produced within clauses as organization when the speakers planned a small unit in utterance in order to keep the speech going. Filled pauses were also produced within clauses with the speakers' purpose to correct mistakes made in speech as well as introduction of a topic before continuous speech.

5. Results

In this study, both types of filled pauses (non-lexical and lexical) were produced in spontaneous speech among the speakers in the dependent and basic user groups. The number of each type of filled pauses produced are illustrated in Table 2.

Types	Filled Pauses	Independent User Group	Total	Basic User Group	Total
Non-lexical Filled Pauses	Ah	39	83	106	166
	Uh	15		23	
	Um	10		22	
	Hmm	19		13	
	Aha	-		2	
Lexical Filled Pauses	Yes	3	49	18	22
	Yeah	17		1	
	Okay	11		-	
	Like	11		1	
	Oh	2		1	
	How to say	3		1	
	I mean	2		-	
	Eoey (เอ๊ย)	3	7	3	5
	Laew (แล้ว)	-		1	
	Baeb (แบบ)	4		1	
		Total	139	Total	193

Table 2. Types of Filled Pauses Produced by Independent User Group and Basic User Group.

Table 2 shows the comparison of types of filled pauses produced by participants in the independent and basic user group. The outcome illustrates that the non-lexical filled pauses produced among the speakers in the two groups are significantly different (83:166). As can be seen, the participants in the basic user group produced double amount of non-lexical filled pauses in their speech in comparison to the independent user group. On the other hand, the production of English lexical filled pauses appears more in the independent user group at 49 times, compared to 22 times in the basic user group. Thai lexical filled pauses were produced at a lesser rate among the speakers in both groups. It can be seen that lexical filled pauses in English were greater than lexical filled pauses in Thai (49:7 in independent user group and 22:5 in basic user group).

Throughout the study, participants produced non-lexical filled pauses "Ah", "Uh", "Um", "Hmm" and "Aha" with "Ah" occurring at the highest frequency among both groups. It was used 106 times by the basic user group and 39 times by independent user group. For instance, // [*Ah*] [I want to be a teacher]. English lexical filled pauses "Yes", "Yeah", "Okay", "Like", "Oh", "How to say" and "I mean" manifested during speech production among the speakers in both groups. "Yeah" was used oftentimes in the independent user group, i.e., // [and [*Yeah*] we are very happy], while "Yes" appeared the most frequently in the basic user group, i.e., [favorite thing [*Yes*] I love music].

The total number of filled pauses occurred the highest in the basic user group. In both groups, the production of lexical filled pauses appeared less than non-lexical filled pauses. Non-lexical filled pauses were used more among speakers in the basic user group than the independent user group. The outcome of the total amount of filled pauses production is consistent with hypothesis 1 which predicted that the number of filled pauses is expected to be higher in the basic user group than the independent user group. On the other hand, the results of lexical filled pauses produced in the independent user group are inconsistent with hypothesis 2 which assumed that the independent user group will produce lexical filled pauses more than non-lexical filled pauses compared to the basic user group. Even though the findings resulted with speakers in independent user group producing non-lexical filled pauses more than lexical filled pauses, their usage of lexical filled pauses in speech shows higher than the basic user

group. This indicates that the speakers in the independent user group had a better command of using the target language in comparison to the basic user group.

The number of filled pauses distributions and functions used among the speakers in both groups is illustrated in Table 3.

Functions	Distributions	Independent User	Total	Basic User	Total
Organization	Between clauses	-	117	10	169
	Before clause	75		81	
	Before phrase	1		2	
	Within clause	41		76	
Correction	Within clause	15	15	13	13
Introduction	Within clause	4	4	11	11
Confirmation	After clause	3	3	-	-
	Total	139	139	193	193

Table 3. A Comparison of Functions and Distributions of Filled Pauses Produced Among the Speakers in the Independent and Basic User Groups.

Table 3 indicates that filled pauses functioning as organization at syntactic boundaries between the two groups are moderately different (117:169). Filled pauses occurred at syntactic boundaries between clauses, i.e., // [Now, I'm studying // [*Ah*] in School of Nursing] [*Yes*] [and my favorite subject is biology], before clause, i.e., // [*Ah*] [I have one sister] and before phrase, i.e., // [*Um*] [how many time]. The basic user group had the highest number of filled pauses occurring at syntactic positions as organization (169 out of 193 times). The speakers in the two groups produced filled pauses most frequently for organization, rather than correction and introduction.

Filled pauses as organization distributed before clauses were higher in the basic user group than the independent user group (81:75). Similarly, the distributions of filled pauses within clauses were higher in the basic user group in comparison to the independent user group (76:41). For instance, within clause (I chose [*Ah*] Titanic). Filled pauses distributed before phrases are similar among both groups. The occurrences of filled pauses within clause functioning as correction (my hobbic [*Eoey*] my hobby is watching Conan detective) were insignificantly higher in the independent user group than in the basic user group. Filled pauses

functioning as introduction (The movie [*Ah*] I like fantasy movie) was significantly higher in the basic user group (11:4).

Filled pauses occurring between clauses are only found in the basic user group. Filled pauses manifested at this position when the speakers produced a filled pause within clause to organize a small unit of speech for the following clause. For example, [she has teach [*Ah*] English] [*Yes*] [my class, [*Ah*] I have [*Ah*] learnt with her in Intensive English]. The production of filled pauses between clauses may indicate the speakers' limitation of lexical recall, resulting in usage of filled pauses in random positions in attempt to keep continuous speech. On the other hand, filled pauses with confirmation function appeared only a few times after clauses in the independent user group. For example, // [how the captain made the decision at the // last minute for the safety reason for all the passengers in the crew [*Uh*] in the cabin] [and they did the wrong thing] [*Yes*]. The example shows that the speaker produced a filled pause [Yes] after the last clause of the utterance to confirm the understanding to herself. It was explained by Castro (2009) that "Yes" was used to confirm understanding in dialogue speech. In the present study, the production of filled pauses occurred after clause in monologue speech, indicating confirmation of speaker's own understanding.

Overall, the number of filled pause distributions in the independent user group occurred more before clauses than within clauses. In contrast, the basic user group had a higher number of filled pauses distributed within clauses than before clauses. The outcome of filled pauses distributions is consistent with hypothesis 3, which assumed that the distributions of filled pauses in the independent user group will appear more often before clauses than within clauses compared to the basic user group.

The number of filled pauses produced as organization was the most frequent function during the study. The basic user group produced filled pauses as introduction more than the independent user group. On the other hand, the independent user group used filled pauses as correction more than the basic user group. This results of filled pauses functioning as correction did not support hypothesis 4, presuming that the speakers in the basic user group will produce filled pauses in order to correct speech more than the speakers in the independent user group.

6. Conclusion

This research study aims to explore the types of filled pauses produced among Thai learners of English with different levels of English language proficiency and to investigate distributions and functions of filled pauses in spontaneous speech.

Both lexical and non-lexical filled pauses were produced by speakers in the two groups. However, the production of non-lexical filled pauses show significantly higher among the speakers in the basic user group than in the independent user group. The production of English lexical filled pauses occurred more in the independent user group than the basic user group. The results show that filled pauses can be used to indicate English language proficiency levels. Rose (1998) pointed out that the use of lexical filled pauses in the target language sounds more native-like and indicates the speaker' fluency in speech. English lexical filled pauses were oftentimes produced by the speakers in the independent user group, indicating the speakers' command of the English language as they organize ideas into speech. These results can be seen supported by many previous studies which indicate that the speakers manifest their level of proficiency through ability to use the target language to fill pauses in their speech (Lauttamus, Nerbonne & Wiersma, 2010; Illiya, 2014; Cenoz, 2017). In contrast, the high number of non-lexical filled pauses production in the basic user group shows that the speakers had limited ability to use filled pauses in English. Thus, the speakers produced non-lexical filled pauses when encountering problems in speech because they are sounds which are easy to use. According to Lauttamus et al. (2010), Afriani (2014) and Erten (2014) the use of non-lexical filled pauses oftentimes indicates disfluency in speech as well as the speakers' limited knowledge of the target language. As can be seen, the use of lexical and non-lexical filled pauses in speech can be influenced by the proficiency levels in English language.

This outcome also reveals that even though the speakers use Thai language to communicate in daily life, when it comes to utter in English they have a tendency to produce non-lexical and English lexical filled pauses more than the type in Thai. The use of English lexical filled pauses may be considered as smooth and continuous speech by the listeners. At the same time, overuse of filled pauses might indicate that the speakers are disfluent in speech.

In terms of distributions, according to many previous studies, filled pauses tend to occur more frequently before clauses than other positions (Boomer, 1965; Cook, 1971; Cook, Smith & Lalljee, 1974; Watanabe & Ishi, 2000; Panichkul, 2003; Watanebe, Den, Hirose & Minematsu, 2004). Filled pauses produced before clauses are treated as organization for a large unit in speech, while within clauses are counted as planning a small unit of speech. In the present study, filled pauses occurred most frequently within and before clauses. In the basic user group, filled pauses occurred within clauses more than before clauses. While in the independent user group, filled pauses occurred before clauses more than within clauses. The speakers in the independent user group are more advanced in English language and they tend to have different distributions of filled pauses compared to the basic user group. They produced filled pauses to organize a large unit more than a small unit in speech. It was pointed out by Clark and Fox Tree (2002) that organizing speech before clauses is not simple because the speakers have to think of the message to deliver in the large unit in speech. The production of filled pauses in speech indicates the speakers' advance level in English language as well as capacity of processing filled pauses as native-like (Watanabe et al., 2005; Wu, 2008).

In the two groups, filled pauses occurred as organization both before clauses and within clauses more than any other position. The occurrences of filled pauses as organization in both groups are higher before clauses than within clauses. It indicates that even through the speakers in both groups had different levels of English language proficiency, they had a tendency to produce filled pauses before clause to organize the large unit of speech, rather than within clause to organize the small unit during the clause being processed.

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