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Engaging Linguistics and Literature:

Perspectives and Insights beyond the Curriculum



English Letters and Language Department
Faculty of Humanities
Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang

The 2nd Forum on Linguistics and Literature (FOLITER)

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Curriculum**

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PREFACE

**HEAD OF THE ENGLISH LETTERS AND LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UIN MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM MALANG**

Honorable the invited speakers, honorable presenters and participants of the second FOLITER Conference, distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen.

First of all, may I invite you to express the grateful feeling to Allah, the Almighty and the most Merciful, for his blessing that we are able to attend the second Forum on Linguistics and Literature 2015 administered by the English Letters and Language Department, Faculty of Humanities, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. It is indeed such a great pleasure for us to extend the warmest welcome and the sincerest greeting to all participants of this favorable occasion. We would also like to express our profound gratitude to the conference committee members in organizing the event with full commitment and incredible dedication.

This year's forum takes *Engaging Linguistics and Literature: Perspectives and Insights beyond the Curriculum* as its theme. Such an issue is widely discussed in the recent postmodern global world, where established concepts and grand theories of linguistics and literature are reinterpreted and, in turn, affects the curriculum design and evaluation in the area of English Language Teaching. This tendency may also trigger the progress of linguistics and literature paradigms, not just within the curriculum but also beyond. The conference thus seeks to address the issues on the perspectives and insights in the application of the concepts of linguistics and literature in relation to the curriculum development.

Our eagerness to hold the conference is one of the Department's concerns on the increasing interests and demands for the higher quality of ELT which takes current issues in linguistics and literature as its bases for innovation. This conference is, therefore, supposed to be a momentous academic forum which may raise significant endeavors to escalate the ELT advancement with regard to linguistics and literature approaches.

We hope that everyone will find the ideas presented in the forum inspiring and that the papers compiled in the proceeding enlightening for the engagement of linguistics and literature perspectives in the development of ELT curriculum. We wish great happiness and success to all parties supporting the forum.

Malang, 1 September 2015
Head,

Dr. Syamsudin, M.Hum.

Improving Vocabulary of Occupational Health and Safety Students through Multimedia Used in the Classroom	117
The Implementation of Graphic Organizer (GO) in Teaching Reading at Third Semester Students of IKIP PGRI Madiun	129
Facilitating Listening Comprehension: Acquiring Listening Strategies	135
Cultural Transfer in EFL's Writing Class	144
The Implementation of Teaching ESP: Problem and Solution	152
Relationship between Explicit Knowledge of Grammar and Proficiency Level of the Students	160
✓ The Use of Fillers as a Speaking-Problem Solving In EFL Learners' Speaking Class	170
Intercultural Learning via Online Chatroom of EFL Students	179
Interacting of English Foreign Language in Classroom Activities at the Junior High School	187
The Influence on Small Group Interaction Technique on Student Achievement in Reading Comprehension	198
The Development of English Textbook Based on The Character Values In Curriculum 2013 For Secondary High School Students In Kabupaten Sumenep Madura	206

LINGUISTICS

World Englishes Issues for Indonesia as an Expanding Country	217
Stuttering Utterances Produced by an English Department Student	233
The Fluidity of Spoken vs. Written Genre: A Discourse Analysis Perspective	242
Metadiscourse and Rhetorical Moves in English Thesis Abstract	250
Contributing Factors Toward First and Second Language Acquisition: A Manifestation of Krashen's <i>Affective Filter Hypothesis</i>	256

Exploring Slang on Eminem's <i>Sing for the Moment</i> Lyrics	264
Discovering Language and Identity in "The Pursuit of Happiness"	271
Cohesion on Essay Writing of Female and Male English Department Students	277
The Translation of Demonstrative References in the Thesis Abstracts	283
Gender Inequality: IRF Pattern in English as a Foreign Language Classroom	294
Vulgarity in <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Tony Morrison	302
Nuwun Sewu: Does It Express Politeness in Javanese Context?	308
Dialect varieties of Madurese language	320
Narrating Presence: The Exploration of Students' Linguistic and Cultural Background	329
Women's Speech Features Used by Women Politician	340
The Application and Violation of Maxims of Politeness Principle in "Cinderella" Movie	350
The Internationalism of Indonesia's Language and Culture: in the relation with Australia and Singapore	357
Code Mixing in Indonesian Television Program: A Case of <i>Opera Van Java</i>	363
Speech Features Used By Willy Loman In Miller's <i>Death of A Salesman</i>	370
Pragmatic Analysis on Teacher's Questioning Functions	379

THE USE OF FILLERS AS A SPEAKING-PROBLEM SOLVING IN EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING CLASS

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Abstract

This study is on the use of fillers as parts of communication strategies by the English Department students of one of the Islamic Universities of Malang as a means to solve their speaking problems. This paper aims at discussing the result of some observations and interviews to two students in the use of fillers strategies to solve their speaking problems. This topic is interesting because the use of fillers has helped EFL learners handle their speaking problems in speaking class. It is necessary for the EFL learners to know more about fillers as parts of communication strategies so that they might develop their speaking skill.

Keywords: fillers, communication strategies, speaking-problem solving, speaking class.

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the important skills that learners might learn in EFL learning. Speaking is very important because by mastering speaking learners are able to express their ideas or opinion to the interlocutors well. However to master speaking is not an easy thing. There are many students who have learned English for years but they are still difficult to speak English fluently. Brown (2007) states that learners' difficulty to master speaking might be caused by the facts that learners have to focus on forms and function of the language. In addition, speaking has two sequential phases: planning and execution. Planning is done when speakers think of what utterance to influence the listeners and execution is the realization of planning into words, phrases and sentences. Phases in speaking might make learners feel difficult to master this skill. To cope with the difficulties in speaking, EFL learners need to understand well about Communication Strategies (Ellis, 1994). Communication strategies are strategies that learners might use to handle their speaking problems. Using communication strategies learners might solve their speaking problems and meet their communication goals (Dornyei, 1995). Related to communication strategies, this study is going to discuss the use of fillers as devices to solve learners' speaking problem. It consists of the description of research methods covering observations and interviews which I use to collect the data, discussion of findings related to theories of communicative competence, learners' proficiency, communication strategies, some other research findings related to communication strategies and conclusion.

2. Description of research methods

In conducting this research, I applied a qualitative case study design. Case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Merriam, 1988). In a qualitative research in education, the researcher depends on the research participants. The researcher collects the data from the subjects in the form of words and he describes and analyzes these words based on themes (Creswell, 2002:46). The strength of qualitative data is their richness and wholeness, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide "thick description" that are vivid, nested to the real context and truthful (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this research, I used two EFL learners as the subjects. Subject1 is identified as Tam and subject 2 is identified as Din. These two EFL learners were chosen based on their criteria of being very active in the speaking class and having good speaking skill. In this study, I focused on their use of fillers to solve their speaking problems.

The data are the particular information that shapes the basis of analysis. Data would include all things that people are doing in the study. Data would also consist of what others have created and the researchers find such as diaries, photographs, official documents, and newspaper articles (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). In addition, data refer to all information needed and are collected by the researcher as the basis to answer the research questions (Susanto, 2010). The data in this research were in the form of learners' verbal and non-verbal expressions or behaviors. Learners' verbal expressions were got from the

utterances expressed by the learners when they had conversation and discussions with their speaking partners. These learners' verbal expressions were recorded and then transcribed to produce transcribed data or texts. And learners' non-verbal behaviors were in the form of hands movements, eyes contacts, mimes and smiles. These learners' non-verbal behaviors were got when they were having conversations or discussions with their speaking partners.

The data were collected through observation and in-depth interview. In the observation, I acted as the non participatory observer and I observed the subjects when they had conversations and the discussions with their friends. During the observation, I recorded learners' utterances using a mini recorder and noted some expressions or behaviors that they did throughout the conversation or the discussion. Next, I interviewed them in what context and why they used non linguistic means and filler strategies in the conversation. Afterward, I transcribed the recorded data and discussed the transcribed data related to some theories of learners' proficiency, communicative competence, communication strategies and some other research findings on communication strategies.

3. Discussion on findings

The subject 1, Tam used fillers during the conversation. It was known when the subject 1, Tam was discussing with his speaking partner talking about family. The conversation took place in the faculty living room. The data indicated that the subject 1, Tam used fillers. It happened when he told to the interlocutor about his habits to live alone. He said: "*emm // ya* actually I have been accustomed to leaving to leaving my parents because *ee* when I was in Senior High School *my my* school is required was required me to *ee stay stay* in the boarding school / and I have to leave there *ee* leave them for *what it is* I have / / / *emm what is it...*". He did fillers because he needed time to think to find the appropriate vocabularies in the conversation. He stated: "I did many expressions such as repetition, pauses, *emm*, etc. because I tried to look for the other appropriate words...I was thinking at that time...". Therefore, an important point to be noted is that subject 1, Tam used fillers when he needed time to think. It was done to solve his communication problems in term of finding the appropriate vocabularies. This was known when he employed some expressions like '*emm, ya, ee, what is it, some pauses and repeated some words like 'my my and stay stay'.*'

The subject 2, Din employed fillers during the conversation. It was known when the subject 2, Din was discussing with his speaking partner talking about students' organization in the classroom. The data in the conversation above indicated that the subject 1, Din employed some expressions like *ee, emm, some repetitions like "this this, lucky lucky, more more, better better, I prefer ee I prefer ee, and to fertilize fertilize*, and also *some pauses*. He said: "...*ee the / the* principal of the campus *ee* may be *ee //our* university wanna create someone *that is ee have ee* characteristic like *Ulul Albab // ee like Ulul Albab* person so // I think this is *ee* really good campus to study / and it is really *ee //emm lucky / ee really lucky* for the student...*I prefer ee I preferee to see or to see* the student there is *emm //join* some organization but as a student we have to be able *to ee / to fertilize fertilize...*". He did fillers because by applying fillers strategies in the conversation he could get time to think and remember the words that he wanted to express. He said: "...when we hesitate we say something or we confused about *ee* what we would say/ and then we we don't find any vocabulary to say ... then *ee* my mind or *ya / my* brain looks for some vocabularies... we repeat our sentence to say / *ya* because we also get *ee* I also get difficulties to say something". Thus subject 2, Din used some fillers strategies in conversation. It was known from the employment of some expressions like "*ee, emm, some repetitions like "this this, lucky lucky, more more, better better", and also some pauses.*"

From the findings above, an important point to be noted is that both EFL learners faced some problems when they were speaking. Their speaking problems were caused by linguistic problems such as being lack of vocabularies and/or lack of grammar mastery. In relation to learners' speaking problems Ellis (1994) states that learners' problems in speaking are generally caused by their lack of mastering some elements in L2. In general, the shortage of the second language might be in the form of a word, a structure, a phrase, a tense marker or an idiom. This shortage might be called as the gaps of knowledge of second language. In speaking these gaps might influence fluency (Bialystok, 1990). In addition, learners' limited or imperfect knowledge of rules in EFL might bring communication problems (Karimnia and Zade, 2007). Further, learners' limitedness on second language might cause difficulties in speaking (Stern, 1983).

To handle their speaking problems both learners used fillers. Using fillers as parts of communication strategies, they might solve their speaking problems. In this case mastering linguistic

elements such as grammar, vocabularies, and pronunciation is important to develop EFL Learners' speaking skill. Dealing with the importance of mastering linguistic elements to develop speaking, Nunan (1991) states that to be able to speak well, learners should master some language elements such as grammar, vocabulary, intonation, pronunciation, stress, and the choice of language functions. In addition, the standard for the learners to speak well is reflected in the pronunciation elements such as sounds, speed pausing, stress, and intonation.

Both learners agreed that communication strategies might help them solve their communication problems. Using communication strategies they might reach their communication goals. Some of the communication strategies that they employed frequently during communication were using fillers strategies. This is relevant to Dornyei (1995) who states that communication strategies are the strategies that learners employ to handle their communication problems. Next, using communication strategies learners could resolve their linguistic problems and talk more comprehensibly (Bialystok, 1990). By employing communication strategies learners might handle their communication problems due to their linguistic problems. For example, when learners try to communicate and the needed linguistic items are not available, they might employ communication strategies to achieve their communication goals. Using communication strategies, a central component in interlanguage, learners might handle their limitedness in interlanguage resources (Ellis, 1994). This is also relevant to Rababah's (2001) finding that the use of communication strategies can solve learners' communication problems.

The study also found that both learners used fillers strategies consciously in speaking. They realized that fillers might help them cope with their communication problems. It was shown by their use of fillers again and again during communication. In relation to the use of fillers as parts of communication strategies in communication, Faerch & Kasper (1983) state that communication strategies are learners' conscious plans for solving problems in reaching communicative goals. Next, the study found that the communication strategies used by the learners might be in the form of verbal and non verbal mechanism. It was shown by their use of certain communication strategies in repeated times when they faced some communication problems. For example, in the **verbal mechanism**, they employed fillers when they needed time to find of the next words or expression they wanted to say. In the **non verbal mechanism**, they employed use of non linguistic means strategy to handle their communication problems such as the use of eyes contacts, smiles, nodes, and also hands movements. In relation to the conscious use of verbal and non verbal communication strategies by the students, Brown (1987: 180) states that communication strategies are a conscious employment of verbal and nonverbal mechanism to communicate ideas when precise linguistic forms are not available to the learners during the communication.

Next, the study also found that both learners were accustomed to use fillers to handle their communication problems during communication. It was found that their interlocutors could understand them when they employed certain fillers to reach their communication goals. This mutual understanding had made them have more fluent conversation to reach their communication goals. Dealing with the function of fillers as parts of communication strategies which might create learners' mutual understanding/meaning during communication, Tarone (1980) states that using communication strategies learners might create mutual understanding with their interlocutors. Next, this might impact to attain the required meaning when requisite meaning structures are not shared. In addition, communication strategies are systematic techniques used by learners to express meanings when they face some difficulties (Corder,1977). Thus, learners who emphasize the importance of using the language often utilize communication strategies (Wenden and Rubin, 1987).

The study indicated that learners' use of fillers in speaking was influenced by learners' language proficiency. This study agrees with Mei and Nathalang's (2007) and Huang's (2010) finding stating that the use of communication strategies was influenced by language proficiency. The data indicated that both learners employed various communication strategies. However, they employed more communication strategies on the use of fillers. They stated that using fillers strategies they might solve their speaking problem due to their limited vocabularies and became more relaxed, comfortable, convincing, and communicative so that the conversation might work well and the interlocutor might comprehend them well. Next, the study found that being classified as the proficient learners both learners employ communication strategies efficiently. For example, they were found to employ more verbal and non verbal communication strategies such as hands movements, eyes contacts, smiles, and other expressions during communication. In this case, the use of communication strategies reflects learners' language development. The finding of the study above is in accordance with Ellis (2008) who concludes that the strategies that learners choose to use reflect their general stage of L2 development, proficient learners

tend to use learning strategies more frequently and qualitatively in different ways than learners who are less proficient and different kinds of learning strategies may contribute to different aspects of L2 proficiency. Afterward, in relation to the language ability and proficiency, Skehan (1986a, 1986b, 1990) reported significant correlations between aptitude and measures of all for language skills including speaking. In addition, there was strong correlations strong correlation between language aptitude and L2 proficiency (Harley and Hart, 1997). In brief, language aptitude predicts successful learning in learners with formal as well as informal learning experience and correlates with measures of communicative as well as controlled language use (Ellis, 2008).

The study found that using fillers both learners were found to speak more enthusiastically and fluently. It was shown in the conversation and the discussion that happened with them in the classroom and outside the classroom. They employed filler strategies frequently. The study found that both learners were very motivated to improve their speaking. It was shown by their activeness in joining some organizations to improve their English like Advance Debate Club (ADC), Malang Debating Union (MDU), and Forum For Indonesia (FFI) Malang. In relation to the use of communication strategies and motivation, this study agrees to Gardner (1985) in Ellis (2008) who state that motivation could gives a causative variables and modification of learners' attitudes could arise of a result of positive learning experiences. Further, Spolsky (1989 in Ellis, 2008) states that greater motivation and attitudes lead to better learning.

The study found that both learners were more active in speaking using fillers. At the same time, they liked to practice speaking with others as part of their social learning strategies. They liked to monitor others in term of their speaking proficiency and it was done to improve their English. For example, they were brave to ask for the tips to be able to speak fluently to their interlocutors when they found that their interlocutors could speak English well and fluently. This kind of bravery by asking to the interlocutors was part of their motivation to be able to speak fluently. They tended to use English during communication and tried to avoid using their native language. They tried to find as many exposures as possible to find speaking partners to practice speaking with them so that they might improve their English. It was proven when they joint some extra organizations where they might improve their English there. Thus, based on the description above, both learners might be classified as good language learners. The findings of the study agree with Stern's (1975) characteristics of good learners. Stern (1975) states some strategies done by good language learners: formal strategy, experimental strategy, semantic strategy, practice strategy, communication strategy, monitoring strategy, and internalization strategy.

Finally, both learners agreed that the use of fillers as parts of communication strategies might help them develop their English speaking. It is known from Tam's statements: "...the use of communication strategies helps me a lot to handle problems in speaking. Communication strategies can improve my speaking skill since some strategies help me find out a way to deliver a message... Fillers help me not to get stuck in the middle of conversation".

4. Conclusions

Based on the research findings above, an important point to be noted is that both EFL learners faced some speaking problems in communication. These speaking problems might be caused by their shortage of linguistic elements such as being lack of vocabulary mastery. To solve their speaking problems EFL Learners might employ fillers strategies. By using fillers they might feel relaxed, comfortable and have enough time to think so that they might solve their speaking problems and continue speaking and reach their speaking goals. Principally, fillers strategies as parts of communication strategies are very important for EFL learners to develop their speaking skill. These strategies have helped EFL learners improve the quality and quantity of learners' speaking practices, both in class or outside class. In this case, filler strategies have made learners become more motivated and enthusiastic to do more speaking practices. Thus, by practicing speaking using fillers continuously, learners' knowledge about English would improve too, especially in terms of the richness in vocabularies, so that they might be motivated to develop their speaking skill.

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