

Speaking Disfluency of an English Major Students at One Public University in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study focused on investigating speaking disfluency of an English major students at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. The researcher applied qualitative method with a case study approach to carry out this study and as the way of collecting the data. Four first year students of English education study program consisting of two males and two females were recruited as participants of this research project. To identify the types of disfluencies produced by the students, the researcher gave them a video from YouTube with the title "Ten mistakes to avoid when defending your thesis" from Ranywayz Random YouTube channel and asked them to retell the content of the video using their own words. After listening, audiotaping, and transcribing their speaking, the disfluencies encountered were analyzed by using Gleason and Ratner theory. The students' disfluencies were then classified into some types such as hesitation, repetition, false starts, and fillers. Each type of speech disfluency would be discussed in the results and discussion sections.

Keywords: English Major Students, Public University, Speaking Disfluency

A. Introduction

Regardless the debates on speaking, previous literature showed that having the ability to speak English fluently both as an L2 and as a foreign language is very important at the university level. In addition, speaking is considered as a skill of not more than just saying words but the cognitive ability of how to arrange words, phrases, and sentences so that they are well-structured and articulate them in a good sequence. Becoming a good speaker requires good communicative competence which was broken down into four different components with two different sub-categories in which the first two sub-categories namely grammatical & discourse competences reflected the use of the linguistic system itself, whereas the last two sub-categories namely sociolinguistic & strategic competences defined the functional aspects of communication (Brown, 2007).

Students especially from non-English speaking countries often get difficulties to speak fluently and effectively for both academic and non-academic purposes. De

Jong (2018) and Lennon (1990) summarize the definition of speaking fluency as “the psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and effectively”. Furthermore, delivers a narrow sense of speaking fluency as “the ability to talk at length with few pauses” or the other statement which describes similar thing as “the capability of filling time with talk”. On the contrary, in view of Berger (2020), speaking disfluencies mainly occur due to linguistic refinement rather than linguistic planning and repair. It means that the speaker is experiencing the process of linguistic internalization to become a better speaker with better linguistic ability whereas linguistic planning and repair frequently happen to speakers with average or low speaking ability.

The importance of speaking disfluencies has become the focus of debates in several previous studies conducted by several research (Bergmann, 2015; De Jong, 2018; Penttilä, 2021; Shriberg, 1994; and Verkasalo, 2021). Although several studies have been conducted about difficulties and constraints in producing a foreign language particularly in the form of spoken language, but very few studies have been undertaken regarding speaking disfluency in the context of English as a foreign language committed by foreign language learners.

For this study, Gleason, and Ratner’s theory (1998) is adopted as a theoretical framework. According to this theory, speech disfluency is the speaker’s utterances with the characteristics of hesitations, repetitions, false starts, and filler words such as um, well, or you know which can occur every five or eight word and be assumed to provide valuable insights into the unit of speech production and permit the evaluation on how much speech is mentally planned of its production. Moreover, a spoken utterance is mental concept turned by a speaker in speaking (Licea-Haquet et al., 2019). Linguists have been investigating the sequences as well as the steps of speech production because this study is more complicated than the study of speech perception or comprehension. The experts applied less direct methods for the investigations to notice the tendency of speaking disfluency to get the insight into how the process is accomplished by the speaker.

This purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate speaking disfluency of the first year of English major students at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. The problem of this study was “What are the types of speech disfluency made by the students in their speaking?”. Meanwhile, the objective of this study was to know what types of speech disfluency made by the students in their speaking. This research is important since research investigating the speaking disfluency done by the Indonesian students in speaking for academic purposes particularly non-English speaking countries in Indonesia is very limited. This study could also be an attempt to fill the gap in the literature in relation to students’ speaking disfluency in retelling a video or a story and what kind of

improvements could be probably undertaken for the betterment of the students' quality in terms of speaking skill.

B. Methods

The writer applied a qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) to investigate speaking disfluency of an English major students at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. Quantitative, for example, survey studies do not enable writers to get in-depth information to reach the primary goal of this study. McMillan & Schumacher (2010) and Creswell (2007) stated that case study research examines a bounded system, or a case, over time in depth, employing various sources of data found in time and place. The researcher defines the case and its boundary. A case can be selected because of its uniqueness or used to illustrate an issue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the writer focused on investigating speaking disfluency conducted by the students of an English education study program at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. The writer asked them to watch a video with the title "Ten mistakes to avoid when defending your thesis" from Ranywayz Random YouTube channel with the duration of 8 minutes 26 seconds. The students are supposed to retell the video one by one using their own words and the writer listened, audiotaped, and transcribed the students' speaking using android cellular phone. The writer obtained the permission from the head of English Education study program.

In applying the sampling procedure, the writer took four first year students of English education study program in his research project. The research participants were taken based on the approval they signed in the informed consent form distributed by the writer some time ago. The writer concealed the names of people, places, and research sites by changing them into pseudonyms to protect the rights of participants. In this study, the writer utilized a purposeful sampling with a convenience case strategy which represents sites or individuals from which researcher can access and collect the data easily (Creswell, 2007). The participants who came from one single class altogether, agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. They were two males and two females: the first one is named Ani, the second one is named Nana, the third one is named Dayat, and the last one is named Faris. As mentioned previously by the writer, four of them were pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participants' Profiles

| No | Names | Gender | Major | Current Status |
|----|-------|--------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | Ani | Female | English Education Study Program | BA/First Year |
| 2. | Nana | Female | English Education Study program | Ba/First Year |
| 3. | Dayat | Male | English Education Study program | BA/First Year |
| 4. | Faris | Male | English Education Study program | BA/First Year |

C. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate speaking disfluency of an English major students at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. The writer applied the theory proposed by Gleason and Ratner (1998). The four students as the sample of the research were the ones who experienced various kinds of disfluencies. The students' disfluencies were categorized into some types such as hesitation, repetition, false starts, and fillers.

Participants of this study were from the first year of English major students at Jambi university who has just taken academic speaking course. Even though they have taken the first series of speaking course namely general speaking course, the students still got some difficulties and a lot of grammatical mistakes as well in retelling the video entitled "Ten mistakes to avoid when defending your thesis" in terms of hesitation, repetition, false starts, and fillers as shown by the following monologue transcription:

Ani: "The fourth mistake is... uhh... assuming that you know everything about your thesis. This is a natural assumption... This is a natural assumption to make. Well, we might know some aspects about of thesis really really well. We ... we have given (forgotten) already. So, give your thesis... So, give your thesis So, give your thesis. So, preparation is important So, preparation is important. Don't mistake your.... uh uhh.... Don't.... make. Don't make. Don't... eh sorry sir, and the last mistake is assuming eh and the last mistake is thinking you will be a better.... Thinking you will be a natural at this. For most people and all these... all most thing in the world, in the life practice makes perfect so preparation is important.

Additionally, another participant who retold the same video experience the same thing as what had been retold by the first participant. Hesitations, repetitions, and

fillers still dominated her speaking as indicated by the following monologue transcription:

Nana: According to the video that has been shared. The first is talking too fast or too slowly. Some people might talk too quickly because it... because it them... it makes them feel better and people who speak slowly are considered nervous but the important thing is that ... eh... audience or examiner understand what we mean whether we are talking too fast or too slowly. The second is rushing yourself before the defence. So ... give yourself plenty of time to the defend to get ready ... eh... don't trust yourself give yourself... give everything ready and in order ahead of time in this way right before the defence you can take some time to just relaxed come down and put yourself in the right state of mind and next not ... not knowing the protocols, the format, and the panel ... and the panel. It is preferable to begin with ... with the presentation by first adhering to the ... by first adhering to the protocols or rules that exist at our university as a last underlying aside from the panels well to be explained to the professor. And then, ... assuming that you know everything that's good but we again we have to demand and understand ... and understand. You have to demand and understand ... again so we can defend the thesis and dissertation and the last one that you will be unnatural preparation and practice are very important ... are very important ... are very important ... hh... are very important. Preparation and practice are very important in order to get the thesis result let's try effort will not betray the result thank you.

Grammar as well as vocabulary are very important in speaking. By having good grammar and the good vocabulary mastery, people can understand us more easily if we use good grammar and tenses. In addition, the following participant still used inappropriate vocabulary and the word which was articulated by the participant was unfinished. Repetitions, hesitations, and the attempt to correct the previous sentence structure happened in the following transcription. However, some sentences were hard to understand what they meant.

Dayat: I'm gonna explain about ten avoid defending your up ... ten mistakes to avoid defending your thesis. The first one is cutting ... cutting the que ... cutting the question or the questioner. I think it can be seen as rude or disrespectful because it prevents the person from [fueli] the expression. The second one is pretending to know when you don't. This refers to our situation when someone claims to have knowledge and understanding of ... of ... question is very ... very annoying when you see someone doesn't know what it is. The third point is being arrogant. I think yaa ... we ... we want to be confident but don't over do it, don't over it because when over in the confident, it is arrogant. It can create negative atmosphere and hinder [effective] communication. The last point rumberling on and on. I think when someone ... uh ... rumberles, they may go on go of on target provide a service detail or

repeat themselves. I think hm... it ... it can be making difficult for other to follow our extra information.

The following transcription from the other participant indicated that preparation was very important when to have a good performance in speaking so that the participant did not make mistakes at the beginning of the talk (false starts). Repetitions, hesitations, and fillers dominating the student's disfluencies in speaking. However, not getting grammar may probably the cause of the disfluencies. Even though this participant's performance was a bit better compared with the previous ones, he still made make mistakes when he started to retell the story from the video.

Faris: So, in this good occasion, I want to explain eh ... some mistakes that needs to avoid when defending your thesis. The fact one is ... eh sorry the first one is cutting off the pace eh ... cutting the questioner. I'd say eh ... don't interrupt the questioner eh ... let them talk, let them finish their question don't cut them off it is... it is just and dis ... disrespectful. So, the second one is pretending to know the answer. When you don't if the question is a ... in difficult we just have to be honest. Don't pretend to know the answer when you don't. Okay, the third one is being arrogant. Don't let your nervousness someone provoke your ... you into being arrogant or disrespectful or being over the top defensive. Okay, the last one is rambling on ... on and on. You should have a clear structure in your answer and try to be a ... conscious and being structure one.

The purpose of this qualitative study, within Gleason and Ratner's (1998) theory, was to investigate speaking disfluency of an English major students at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the academic year 2022/2023. From the four characteristics of disfluency namely: hesitations, repetitions, false starts, and filler words like yaa, eh, huh (which were commonly called as unfilled pauses), this study revealed that **repetitions** were the most disfluency done by the four participants. Then, it was followed by **fillers, hesitations, and false starts** respectively. The finding of this study aligns with the result of research conducted by De Jong et al. (2015) in which their participants' speech contained significantly more repetitions and corrections in L2 Dutch than in L1 Turkish and L1 English. In the context of English as a foreign language, the same thing also happened where the participants repeated and corrected their previous speech at the same time. The findings also indicated that repetitions happened not only in the use of single word, but also in the use of some words or phrases. The repetitions even occurred three or four times as indicated by Nana, the first participant of this study. Furthermore, the repetitions in terms of noun subjects and pronoun subjects done by all participants in this study, and this is in line with the findings described by Shriberg (1994) who stated that repetitions could occur on the subject pronoun for examples: I, preparation, give

your thesis. Furthermore, repetitions could also occur on the subject and auxiliary verbs both at the beginning and in the middle of the sentences, for instance it is ... it is ... or we ... we ... (like what Ani & Dayat said in their speech) or repeating definite article the the ... in spontaneous or unplanned speech (Shriberg, 1994). Fillers like um, well, or you know conducted by L2 students were different from students whose English as a foreign language who tended to say yaa, eh, and uh as their fillers. Sometimes, they did not say anything and left the pauses blank because they hesitated to say the words. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, they used fillers spontaneously as the signal of deciding what words to say e.g., ... uh ..., ... um ... This finding was in line with Shriberg's (1994) disfluency theory stating that in producing words or sentences, we must decide what to say, how to say it, and how to coordinate our interactions with others all in real time. It is thus hardly surprising that we sometimes need to pause, or to repair our previous speech.

In terms of hesitations, the participants were doubtful whether they used the correct word or not as stated by Ani who felt confused by saying ... in the 'world', in the 'life'. In this case, she hesitated whether the first noun 'world' was already appropriate in her sentence. So, she decided to correct her sentence by substituting the word 'world' with the word 'life'. In addition, the same thing was also conducted by Nana who reflected her hesitation by saying it them... it make (it should be 'makes'). In this case, she used the object pronoun 'them' as a predicate in her sentence and she succeeded to replace it with the word 'make' although it was still incorrect. The similar thing was done by Dayat as well by saying ... don't over (do) it, don't over it... However, he omitted the word 'do' in the sentence for he hesitated whether it was correct or not. Those participants did not seem to have the consistency in their words and sentences since they frequently changed the word that they thought as incorrect one. That the incapability of predicting the upcoming speech could also be the reason of speaking disfluency which made the the participants which reduced the listeners' belief (Arnold, et al., 2007, Bosker et al., 2014, & Huizeling et al., 2021).

The last type of speaking disfluency was the false starts in which the participants made mistakes at the beginning of their speech. The false starts occurred at the beginning of the sentence. However, among those four research participants, none of them did the false starts at the beginning of their speech. It could happen due to their readiness to begin the speech but tended to have disfluencies in the middle or at the end of their speech.

D. Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that the YouTube video entitled “Ten mistakes to avoid when defending your thesis” from Ranywayz Random YouTube channel with the duration of 8 minutes 26 seconds can be categorized as a good video with good pronunciation. Nevertheless, the participants still get difficulties in retelling the content of the video using their own words. It can be proven by the speaking disfluencies they made which can be subdivided into four categories: hesitations, repetitions, false starts, and fillers. The most disfluency is dominated by repetitions, then followed by fillers, hesitations and the last one is false starts. For the last category, none of the participants did it since they have already prepared themselves for how to open their speech. Anyway, this study has weaknesses. First, the small number of participants do not permit more rigorous descriptions. The second one, this study is too qualitative so that the data cannot be quantified, in other words, it is recommended for future researchers to conduct a quantitative study with quantitative data so the data can be analyzed by using statistical analysis. It is also suggestible to do research with more categories or indicators of speaking disfluency besides hesitations, repetitions, false starts, and fillers to provide broader understanding concerning this study. And the last one, it is also necessary to do research in relation to students’ grammar ability since there are still a lot of grammatical errors done by students especially who those who come from non-English speaking countries.

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