

## FUNCTIONAL AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF FILLER UNITS IN SPONTANEOUS SPEECH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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**Abstract.** This article provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of filler units in spontaneous speech in English and Uzbek languages. The study investigates their functional and pragmatic roles, including hesitation management, discourse organization, emotional expression, and interactional control. The research is based on 100 speech samples and applies discourse analysis and statistical methods. The results demonstrate both universal and language-specific characteristics of filler usage.

**Keywords:** spontaneous speech, fillers, pragmatics, discourse markers, English, Uzbek.

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqola ingliz va o'zbek tillarida spontan nutqda uchraydigan filler birliklarning keng qamrovli qiyosiy tahlilini taqdim etadi. Tadqiqot fillerlarning funksional va pragmatik rollarini, jumladan ikkilanishni boshqarish, diskursni tashkil etish, emotsional ifoda va interaksiyani nazorat qilishni o'rganadi. Tadqiqot 100 ta nutq namunasi asosida olib borilgan va unda diskurs tahlili hamda statistik metodlar qo'llanilgan. Natijalar filler birliklarning universal hamda tilga xos xususiyatlarini namoyon qilganini ko'rsatadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** spontan nutq, filler birliklar, pragmatika, diskurs markerlari, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili.

**Аннотация.** В данной статье представлен всесторонний сравнительный анализ filler-единиц в спонтанной речи на английском и узбекском языках. Исследование изучает их функциональные и прагматические роли, включая управление колебаниями, организацию дискурса, эмоциональное выражение и контроль взаимодействия. Исследование основано на 100 образцах речи и использует дискурсивный анализ и статистические методы. Результаты демонстрируют как универсальные, так и специфические для конкретного языка характеристики использования filler-единиц.

**Ключевые слова:** спонтанная речь, filler-единицы, прагматика, дискурсивные маркеры, английский язык, узбекский язык.

**Introduction.** Spontaneous speech represents a natural form of human communication produced in real time without prior planning. It is characterized by hesitations, pauses, repetitions, and the frequent use of filler units. Fillers play a crucial role in maintaining the flow of communication and reducing cognitive load.

The relevance of this study lies in the growing interest in discourse analysis, pragmatics, and applied linguistics, particularly in second language acquisition and communication strategies.

**Literature analysis.** Previous studies have highlighted the importance of fillers in discourse. Clark (1996) emphasized their role in speech production, while Schiffrin (1987) classified them as discourse markers. Levinson (1983) analyzed their pragmatic functions. Recent research also connects fillers with cognitive processing and interaction management.

This study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of filler units in spontaneous speech in English and Uzbek. The findings confirm that fillers are multifunctional linguistic tools, performing cognitive, pragmatic, and emotional roles within natural discourse. While both English and Uzbek fillers share universal functions—such as hesitation management, discourse organization, and interactional control—they differ in lexical choice, contextual flexibility, and emotional expressiveness.

English fillers are more standardized and frequently act as conventional discourse markers, supporting fluency and structuring in conversation. Uzbek fillers, in contrast, are more flexible and context-dependent, often conveying emotional nuances and reflecting informal speech patterns. These differences illustrate the interplay between linguistic typology and cultural communication norms.

**Research methodology.** The present study employs a combination of comparative, descriptive, and statistical methods to investigate the functional and pragmatic roles of filler units in spontaneous speech in English and Uzbek. This multi-method approach allows the research to capture both qualitative nuances and quantitative patterns, ensuring a thorough understanding of filler usage across languages.

**Corpus:** The dataset consists of 100 spontaneous speech samples, including 50 English and 50 Uzbek recordings, carefully selected to represent authentic communicative contexts. These contexts include structured and unstructured interviews, informal conversations among peers, classroom discussions, and media-based speech from radio and television broadcasts. Each sample ranges between 3 and 10 minutes, providing a substantial amount of discourse for detailed analysis of filler units.

**Participants:** Participants were native speakers of English and Uzbek, aged between 18 and 45, with diverse educational and social backgrounds. Gender balance was maintained to ensure representative data, and all participants provided informed consent for the use of their speech in research.

#### Data Collection Procedures:

1. **Recording:** All speech samples were recorded using high-quality digital audio devices in quiet environments to minimize background noise and preserve acoustic clarity.
2. **Transcription:** Verbatim transcriptions were produced, carefully noting all fillers, pauses, repetitions, self-corrections, and intonation patterns. Non-verbal cues, such as laughter or sighs, were also annotated to provide context for pragmatic interpretation.
3. **Data Validation:** A second independent researcher cross-checked the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and reliability, particularly for filler identification and classification.

**Analysis Procedures: Identification and Classification:** Filler units were systematically identified in each transcript and classified based on their functional roles (e.g., hesitation, planning, discourse management, emotional expression) and pragmatic functions (e.g., signaling uncertainty, structuring turn-taking, emphasizing points).

**Quantitative Analysis:** Frequency counts, percentages, and comparative statistics were calculated to assess the prevalence and distribution of different filler types across languages.

**Qualitative Analysis:** Contextual examination of fillers provided insight into the pragmatic and interactional roles they play within spontaneous speech, highlighting language-specific and universal features.

**Comparative Analysis:** Cross-linguistic comparisons were conducted to reveal similarities and differences in the use, frequency, and function of filler units in English and Uzbek, considering both linguistic and cultural factors.

This methodological framework ensures a systematic, replicable, and rigorous investigation into filler usage, allowing the study to draw reliable conclusions about the functional and pragmatic characteristics of fillers in spontaneous speech across typologically distinct languages.

**Results and discussion.** The analysis of 100 spontaneous speech samples (50 English and 50 Uzbek) revealed significant patterns regarding the functional and pragmatic use of filler units. Filler units were categorized into four main types based on their roles: hesitation fillers, planning fillers, discourse management fillers, and emotional expression fillers.

**Frequency of Fillers. English:** Hesitation fillers such as *um, uh, you know* accounted for 35% of all filler occurrences. Planning fillers, such as *let me see* and *well*, represented 25%, discourse management fillers (e.g., *so, I mean*) made up 20%, and emotional fillers (e.g., *oh, hmm*) comprised 20%.

**Uzbek:** Hesitation fillers like *xullas, yani* appeared 40% of the time. Planning fillers such as *ko'raylik* and *ya'ni* accounted for 22%, discourse management fillers (e.g., *shunday qilib*) made up 18%, and emotional fillers (e.g., *ah, hmm*) comprised 20%.

#### Functional Patterns

Hesitation fillers were predominantly used to manage speech flow and cognitive load, allowing speakers time to plan their next utterance. Planning fillers indicated the speaker's intention to structure or organize upcoming information. Discourse management fillers contributed to turn-taking, topic shifts, and signaling relationships between ideas. Emotional fillers provided insight into speaker attitudes, affect, and engagement in conversation. **Cross-linguistic Differences.** English fillers showed more standardization and appeared as conventional discourse markers in many contexts.

Uzbek fillers were more context-dependent, often reflecting speaker emotions and informal speech styles. Both languages shared universal functional roles, such as managing hesitation, organizing discourse, and maintaining interactional control, but differed in the choice of lexical items and frequency distribution.

**Summary of Findings.** The total number of fillers in English and Uzbek samples was roughly similar, but their types and pragmatic functions varied.

Uzbek speakers used fillers more flexibly for emotional expression, while English speakers relied more on conventional discourse markers.

These patterns reflect both typological language differences and cultural communication styles.

The present study confirms that filler units are an essential feature of spontaneous speech, serving multiple pragmatic and functional purposes in both English and Uzbek. These findings align with previous research (Clark, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987; Levinson, 1983), supporting the idea that fillers are crucial for cognitive planning, discourse organization, and interactional control.

**Cross-linguistic Insights.** While both languages share universal roles for fillers, English shows a higher level of lexical standardization, using fillers like *um*, *uh*, *you know*, and *well* consistently across contexts.

In contrast, Uzbek fillers demonstrate greater variability and are sensitive to conversational context, reflecting informal and emotionally expressive speech patterns. This difference may be attributed to cultural and sociolinguistic factors, such as norms of politeness, conversational pace, and emotional expressiveness.

**Cognitive and Pragmatic Functions.** Fillers in both languages reduce cognitive load, giving speakers time to plan syntactic structures and organize their discourse.

They also function as interactional signals, indicating speaker engagement, turn-holding, and the desire to maintain listener attention.

Emotional fillers in Uzbek speech often enhance expressiveness and convey subtle attitudes, while English fillers focus more on discourse structuring.

**Implications for Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching**

Understanding filler usage is essential for second language acquisition, particularly in developing fluency and naturalness in speaking.

Awareness of cross-linguistic differences can assist teachers in training learners to interpret fillers appropriately in English and Uzbek communication.

This study also highlights the importance of teaching interactional competence, as fillers help manage conversation flow and pragmatic meaning in real-time speech.

**Limitations and Future Research.** The corpus size (100 samples) is moderate; larger datasets could provide more comprehensive patterns.

Further research may investigate age, gender, and social context effects on filler usage. Comparative studies with other languages could enhance understanding of universal vs. language-specific features of spontaneous speech fillers.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that fillers are multifunctional units, combining cognitive, pragmatic, and emotional roles in spontaneous speech. English and Uzbek fillers share universal functions but differ in lexical choices, contextual flexibility, and emotional expressiveness, reflecting both linguistic typology and cultural norms. These insights are valuable for pragmatic analysis, discourse studies, and applied

language teaching, contributing to a deeper understanding of spontaneous speech mechanisms across languages.

The study has important implications for applied linguistics, language teaching, and second language acquisition, emphasizing the need for awareness of cross-linguistic filler usage to improve fluency, pragmatics, and interactional competence. Future research could expand the corpus, include diverse sociolinguistic groups, and compare additional languages to further investigate universal and language-specific characteristics of filler units in spontaneous speech.

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