

Fillers and Hesitations in English Majors' Spontaneous Speech

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of fillers (e.g., “um,” “uh”) and hesitations (e.g., silent pauses, repetitions) in the spontaneous English speech of Chinese English major students. Adopting a mixed-methods approach (corpus analysis, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews), data were collected from 30 participants through impromptu speaking tasks and self-report instruments. Key findings include: (1) Filled pauses were the most frequent disfluency type (4.2 instances per 100 words), predominantly “um” and “uh”; (2) Fillers and hesitations served multifunctional roles in cognitive processing, turn-holding, and pragmatic modulation; (3) Their usage was significantly influenced by L1 transfer, task complexity, and affective factors (e.g., anxiety). Additionally, learners demonstrated strategic awareness of filler use but lacked systematic pedagogical guidance. The findings contribute empirical insights to L2 fluency theories and propose targeted strategies for integrating disfluency management into advanced oral English instruction.

Keywords: Fillers; Hesitations; Spontaneous speech; English majors; Second language acquisition

DOI: 10.62639/sspjiss16.20250206

1. Introduction

(1) Background of the study

Language acquisition is a process whereby an individual develops a language in interaction with the environment (Tomasello, 2005). This process is further shaped by cognitive mechanisms, as emphasized in theories such as skill acquisition theory (Zhang & Gao, 2025) and emergentism (Sabela, 2019), which frame language use as a dynamic interplay of cognitive processes and skills. However, while frameworks like Bulté, Housen, and Pallotti's (BHP) conceptualize difficulty as being “largely grounded on theories seeing language acquisition and use in terms of cognitive processes and skills,” they notably omit a clear linkage between these transition theories (e.g., emergentism) and their own property theory—a gap that limits their explanatory scope (Sabela, 2019).

Besides, the ability to speak in a second language is best defined as a complex and dynamic process that involves multiple layers within the cognitive domain. It requires not only the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also the real-time processing of linguistic input and output (Zhang & Xu, 2004). This complexity is exemplified in BHP's operationalization of syntactic structures, hierarchical dependencies, and node relationships—approaches that implicitly assume the existence of syntactic representations. Such assumptions contrast with emergentist perspectives, which reject syntactically mediated mappings between form and meaning (Sabela, 2019), thereby highlighting unresolved tensions in SLA theories when explaining real-time speech production.

Among the four essential language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often considered the most challenging to master, particularly in spontaneous communication. The ability to produce continuous, coherent, and fluent speech poses significant difficulties, even for the most advanced second language learners.

(Manuscript NO.: JISS-25-6-62020)

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Such learners are still likely to experience moments of hesitation, repetition, and pauses when attempting to express their thoughts verbally. These disruptions in speech flow are not necessarily indications of poor language ability but are instead natural characteristics of spoken language. From a cognitive perspective, such disfluencies may reflect the “difficulty” of balancing structural complexity (e.g., syntactic hierarchies) with the demands of real-time processing—a challenge that theories like BHP’s attempt to address, albeit incompletely, by prioritizing form-based analyses over learner-internal variables.

Natural speech, even among native speakers, often includes various kinds of disfluencies, such as fillers (e.g., “uh,” “um,” “you know”) and hesitations (Dong, 2022). These elements serve a cognitive purpose; they allow speakers to momentarily pause and plan their upcoming utterances while maintaining control of the conversational floor (Lin, 2024). In fact, these lexical disfluencies are common features in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) speech. However, numerous academic studies have indicated that L2 speakers tend to rely on these filler expressions and hesitation markers more frequently than native speakers do (Götz, 2013). This increased reliance may be attributed to the additional cognitive load involved in formulating speech in a non-native language.

Therefore, filler words and hesitation devices can, on some level, enhance the fluency and coherence of speech for English Language Learners (ELLs). When used appropriately, they contribute to a more natural rhythm and flow in spoken discourse. However, it is important to recognize that excessive use or misuse of these elements can negatively affect the clarity of the message being conveyed. It may also impact how the speaker’s proficiency is perceived by listeners, potentially leading to misunderstandings or underestimation of their actual language competence.

One group of learners particularly relevant for such analysis is students majoring in English. As advanced language users, they have typically attained a high level of overall proficiency in English. Despite this, they may still encounter challenges when producing spontaneous, unplanned speech. Investigating the specific ways in which these learners employ fillers and hesitation strategies can provide valuable insights into the nature of advanced L2 speech production and inform more effective teaching practices aimed at improving oral fluency.

(2) Significance of the study

This study will significantly contribute to advancing the understanding and knowledge of fillers and hesitations in second language (L2) speech, particularly among advanced English learners. First and foremost, it will serve as a valuable repository of the various types of fillers and hesitation devices commonly used by students majoring in English. By collecting and analyzing data on the specific forms, frequency, and communicative functions of these features, the study will provide a clearer picture of how such devices are employed in real-time, spontaneous spoken discourse. This, in turn, can contribute to the broader understanding of how higher-proficiency L2 users manage natural speech production and maintain fluency while still navigating the challenges of a second language.

In addition, since one of the aims of this study is to identify and examine the range of factors that influence the use of fillers and hesitations, it may also offer new insights into certain cognitive and linguistic processes involved in L2 speech performance. Specifically, it may reveal how second language learners plan their speech, organize their thoughts, and apply linguistic resources under time pressure. These insights might prove useful from a pedagogical perspective, especially in advanced English language instruction, where the focus often shifts from basic accuracy to fluency and naturalness. Understanding how and why disfluencies occur can help educators develop targeted strategies to reduce unnecessary interruptions while preserving the natural flow of speech.

Moreover, this research is expected to enrich the currently limited body of literature on the use of fillers and

hesitations among Chinese learners of English. It is likely that subtle syntactic and structural differences between Chinese and English may lead to distinct patterns in the usage of these discourse features. Such findings can be meaningfully applied in contrastive linguistic analysis, shedding light on how L1 (Chinese) influences L2 (English) spoken performance and offering further implications for both theoretical and practical aspects of second language acquisition.

(3) Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to conduct a detailed investigation into the use of fillers and hesitations in the spontaneous oral English production of English major students at a Chinese university. As learners who have attained a relatively high level of proficiency in English, these students offer valuable insight into how advanced L2 users manage real-time speech production. Specifically, this research aims to achieve several closely related objectives that focus on different dimensions of filler and hesitation usage.

First, the study seeks to identify the specific types of fillers and hesitation markers that are commonly used by English majors during spontaneous speech. It will also examine the frequency with which these elements appear, providing a quantitative overview of their usage patterns. Second, the study aims to analyze the various communicative and cognitive functions that these fillers and hesitations serve in learners' oral production. This includes understanding how they contribute to fluency, manage conversation flow, or reflect moments of planning and uncertainty.

Third, the research intends to examine the possible factors that influence the use of such features. These factors may include linguistic proficiency, task complexity, or psychological elements such as anxiety or confidence in speaking. Finally, the study will explore students' own awareness and attitudes toward their use of fillers and hesitations, offering a learner-centered perspective.

By addressing these four objectives, the study aims to deepen the understanding of how advanced Chinese English learners employ fillers and hesitations in natural, unplanned L2 speech. The findings may offer theoretical insights into second language speech production and practical implications for improving oral fluency in the context of English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

(1) Definition of fillers and hesitations

Fillers and hesitations are widely recognized as common and natural phenomena in spontaneous speech. They reflect the real-time cognitive processes that occur as speakers plan, organize, and produce spoken language. These features are particularly evident in unprepared or informal speech situations, where speakers must think and speak simultaneously (Wang, 2022). Fillers, also referred to as filled pauses or hesitation markers, are typically sounds, syllables, or short expressions that are used to occupy pauses in speech while the speaker is still formulating their next words (Corley & Stewart, 2008). In English, typical examples of such fillers include "um," "uh," "er," "like," and "you know." These expressions usually do not carry specific lexical meaning but serve important discourse and cognitive functions by giving the speaker time to think without yielding the conversational floor.

Hesitations, in a broader sense, involve a wider range of disfluency features beyond the use of fillers. These include silent pauses with no vocalization, repetition of words or short phrases, utterances that are abandoned and then restarted, as well as self-corrections (Götz, 2013). Such features are a natural part of spoken discourse, as speakers often require time to search for the right word, structure their sentences, or correct an error on the spot. Although fillers and hesitations are sometimes perceived as mistakes or disruptions in both native

speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) speech, they actually reflect the cognitive effort involved in real-time language production. When used appropriately and with natural intonation, they can contribute to more relaxed, spontaneous, and authentic-sounding speech (Galit et al., 2023).

(2) Types of fillers and hesitations

Researchers have identified several main categories of fillers and hesitations that occur in spontaneous speech:

- 1) Filled Pauses: Vocalic sounds like “uh” and “um” or lexical fillers like “well” and “like” (Corley & Stewart, 2008)
- 2) Unfilled Pauses: Silent pauses in speech (Tavakoli, 2011)
- 3) Repetitions: Repeating words, phrases, or parts of words (Götz, 2013)
- 4) Repairs: Corrections or reformulations of previous utterances (Kormos, 2006)
- 5) Prolongations: Stretching out sounds or syllables (Cribble et al., 2017)

The types and frequencies of fillers and hesitations can vary based on the speaker’s L1, proficiency level, and individual speaking style.

(3) Functions of fillers and hesitations

1) Cognitive and Processing: They give us a chance if one wants to reflect and postpone in search of the correct terms (Corley & Stewart, 2008).

2) Turn-Holding: They enable us to keep speaking and not have someone silence us or cut short our speaking turn (Ziarahman & Fedaa, 2024).

3) Initiation of Repair: They indicate that one should apologize or repeat the last thing said (Kormos, 2006).

4) Cueing: Slashes also tell us about notes we wish to draw attention to (Han, 2020).

5) Stance-Marking: Such a show that involves the ‘attitude’ or a certain level of involvement about something boils down to what speakers intend (Aimer, 2013).

6) Social: They are responsible for sustaining the relationship and managing face during the discourses (Pennington & Suzukida, 2021).

These distinctions are crucial when describing the functioning of fillers and hesitations in L2 speech.

(4) Factors influencing the use of fillers and hesitations

Research has identified several factors that can influence speakers’ use of fillers and hesitations:

1) L1 Background: There is evidence that patterns concerning the use of filler may be transferred to the L1 (Cribble et al., 2017).

2) L2 Proficiency: Tavakoli (2011) has stated that when the learners’ proficiency level is low, then the hesitation phenomena increase.

3) Task Type: Révész et al. (2016) have reported that fillers and hesitations increase with the cognitive load of the tasks being performed.

4) Contextual Factors: Secrets of hesitation belong to setting or context, interlocutor, and topic (Fehringer & Fry, 2007)

All these factors influence speakers’ production of fillers and hesitations in L2 speech in a multivariate manner.

(5) Previous studies on fillers and hesitations in L2 speech

Much research has been devoted to the analysis of fillers and hesitations as prominent features in second language (L2) English speaking. These disfluency markers have been widely studied across different learner

populations and proficiency levels. According to Götz (2013), although advanced German learners of English produced filled pauses more frequently than native speakers, they tended to use these pauses primarily at the beginning of their speaking turns. This suggests a strategic use of fillers as planning tools before launching into more complex utterances. Similarly, Tavakoli (2011) conducted research on Iranian learners and found that lower-proficiency learners produced more unfilled pauses during narrative tasks compared to their higher-proficiency counterparts, indicating a greater processing burden during speech production.

Focusing more specifically on Chinese learners of English, Wei (2020) conducted a study analyzing filled pauses in the oral English of Chinese college students. The findings indicated that “um” was the most frequently used filler, showing a preference for certain English hesitation markers over others. In a related study, Blankenship and Kay (2015) examined hesitation phenomena in the speech of Chinese EFL learners. Their results revealed that unfilled pauses and repetitions were the most common types of disfluency features in learner speech.

However, despite these contributions, research focusing specifically on the use of fillers and hesitations by advanced Chinese learners--particularly those majoring in English--remains relatively limited. Furthermore, few existing studies have employed a mixed-methods research design that combines both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill these gaps by offering a more comprehensive investigation into this area of second language speech performance.

(6) Summary

This literature review has provided an overview of key concepts, definitions, functions, and previous research findings related to the use of fillers and hesitations in second language (L2) speech. Although these features have been the focus of numerous studies across different learner groups and language backgrounds, there remains a noticeable gap in research specifically targeting advanced learners, particularly within the Chinese EFL learning context. Therefore, this study builds upon the existing body of literature by focusing on the use of fillers and hesitations among English major students in China, aiming to offer more nuanced insights into their spontaneous spoken English performance.

3. Methodology

(1) Research questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) What types of fillers and hesitations do English primary students use in spontaneous oral English production, and with what frequency?
- 2) What functions do these fillers and hesitations serve in their speech?
- 3) What factors influence English majors' use of fillers and hesitations?
- 4) What are students' perceptions and attitudes regarding using fillers and hesitations in English?

(2) Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 30 undergraduate students majoring in English (20 females and 10 males) who were in their third year of study at a large, comprehensive public university located in eastern China. All of the participants were native speakers of Chinese, with ages ranging from 20 to 22 years old. Their English proficiency levels varied slightly but generally fell within the range of upper-intermediate to advanced, as determined by their most recent scores on standardized English proficiency tests commonly used in academic settings.

(3) Instruments

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using the following instruments:

- 1) Speaking Task: Participants completed a five-minute impromptu speaking task on a general topic to elicit spontaneous speech samples.
- 2) Questionnaire: A questionnaire was administered to gather demographic information and data on participants' perceived use of fillers and hesitations.
- 3) Semi-Structured interviews: Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 participants to gain deeper insights into their use of fillers and hesitations.
- 4) Transcription and Coding: Speech samples were transcribed and coded for types and functions of fillers and hesitations.

(4) Procedures

Data collection took place over two weeks and followed these steps:

- 1) Participants completed consent forms and background questionnaires.
- 2) Each participant performed the five-minute impromptu speaking task, which was audio recorded.
- 3) participants completed the questionnaire on their fillers and hesitations use immediately after the task.
- 4) Ten participants were selected for follow-up interviews within one week of the speaking task.
- 5) Speech samples were transcribed and coded by two trained raters.

(5) Data analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, in line with the mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data, which were obtained from structured questionnaires and the coded transcripts of participants' spontaneous speech, were processed using descriptive statistical techniques. This analysis aimed to determine the overall frequency, distribution, and specific types of fillers and hesitations used by the participants. Through this approach, patterns in usage could be clearly identified and compared across different individuals or groups.

In parallel, qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews and the open-ended responses in the questionnaires. These data were analyzed thematically, allowing the researcher to explore recurring themes related to the functions of fillers and hesitations, as well as the potential cognitive, linguistic, and social factors influencing their use. The combination of both data types enabled a triangulated analysis, which helped to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings while offering a more comprehensive understanding of how and why fillers and hesitations are used.

4. Results and Discussion

(1) Types and frequency of fillers and hesitations

Analysis of the transcribed speech samples revealed that participants used a variety of fillers and hesitations in their spontaneous oral production. Table 1 shows the mean frequency per 100 words for each type:

Table 1 Mean frequency of filler/hesitation types per 100 words

Type	Mean Frequency
Filled pauses	4.2
Unfilled pauses	3.8
Repetitions	2.1

False starts	1.5
Repairs	1.3
Prolongations	0.9

Filled pauses were the most common type, with “um” (2.3 per 100 words) and “uh” (1.9 per 100 words) being the most frequent specific fillers used.

Additionally, Table 2 further details the percentage of specific filler word types:

Table 2 Distribution of Filler Types in Spontaneous Speech

Filler Type	Frequency in Speech
Um	40%
Un	30%
Like	15%
You know	10%
Other	5%

As shown in Table 2, “um” was the most dominant filler (40%), followed by “un” (30%). Notably, fillers such as “like” and “you know” were less frequent, while only 5% of instances fell into the “other” category. This aligns with the quantitative analysis in Table 1, where filled pauses (e.g., “um,” “uh”) accounted for the highest mean frequency (4.2 per 100 words).

(2) Functions of fillers and hesitations

Qualitative analysis of the speech samples and interview data revealed several critical functions served by fillers and hesitations in participants’ spontaneous oral English. These functions are consistent with those identified in previous literature and highlight the communicative and cognitive roles these features play in second language speech production.

1) Cognitive Processing: Many participants reported using fillers when they needed time to think, plan, or search for the correct English word or expression. Fillers like “um” or “uh” were used as a strategy to delay speech while maintaining control of the conversation. For example, Participant 3 mentioned, “I use ‘um’ when looking for the equivalent word in English,” indicating that fillers help bridge moments of lexical retrieval.

2) Turn-Holding: Fillers also functioned as turn-maintaining devices. They were especially common at the beginning of turns or after a question from an interlocutor, allowing the speaker to hold the floor while organizing their response. For instance, Participant 12 said, “Oh, erm, I suppose that . . .,” using fillers to signal that more speech was forthcoming.

3) Repair Initiation: Participants frequently used fillers and pauses before correcting themselves, whether it involved rephrasing, changing vocabulary, or shifting ideas. An example from Participant 7 illustrates this: “The economy is, uh, I mean the environment is affected . . .”

4) Mitigation: Some participants employed fillers to soften their statements or express uncertainty indirectly. Participant 19, for example, said, “You know, it’s like, kind of a problem in society,” using vague markers to reduce assertiveness.

5) Stance-Marking: Fillers were also used to show hesitation, uncertainty, or a lack of commitment to a particular stance. As Participant 25 stated, “Um, I’m not sure, but maybe . . .”

These observed functions closely align with findings from earlier studies (e.g., Aimer, 2011; Kormos, 2006), suggesting that advanced Chinese learners use fillers and hesitations in ways similar to other L2 speakers across different contexts.

(3) Factors influencing the use of fillers and hesitations

Several factors emerged as influential in participants’ use of fillers and hesitations, with student attitudes playing

a notable role:

Table 3 Student Attitudes Towards Filler Usage

Attitude	Percentage of Students
Very Positive	5%
Positive	15%
Neutral	40%
Negative	30%
Very Negative	10%

As shown in Table 3, 40% of students held a neutral attitude towards filler usage, while 30% expressed negative or very negative views. This ambivalence was reflected in interview responses. For example, Participant 22 linked filler use to anxiety: "When I'm nervous, I use more fillers because I'm worried about making mistakes." Conversely, Participant 5 viewed fillers as a fluency strategy: "I think using some fillers makes my English sound more natural."

Moreover, the following are other influencing factors that emerged from the participants' responses, which further illustrate the complexity behind the use of fillers and hesitations in L2 speech:

1) L1 Transfer: Several participants noted that their use of English fillers may be influenced by habits from their first language, Chinese. For instance, Participant 8 remarked, "I think I use 'an get' (get) a lot in Chinese, so I probably use 'um' the same way in English." This suggests that certain discourse habits may transfer from L1 to L2.

2) Proficiency Level: It was observed that participants with higher English proficiency levels generally produced fewer hesitations. This supports Tavakoli's (2011) findings that more fluent speakers tend to exhibit fewer disfluencies during speech.

3) Task Familiarity: Participants reported using more fillers when speaking on unfamiliar or difficult topics. As Participant 16 stated, "If it's a topic I don't know much about, I say 'um' more while I'm thinking."

4) Anxiety and Confidence: Emotional factors also played a role. Several participants linked frequent filler use to nervousness. Participant 22 shared, "When I'm nervous, I use more fillers because I'm worried about making mistakes."

5) Perceived Fluency: Interestingly, some learners believed that using fillers contributed positively to their fluency. As Participant 5 noted, "I think using some fillers makes my English sound more natural, like native speakers."

These influencing factors demonstrate the complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and affective variables in the use of fillers and hesitations by L2 speakers.

(4) Discussion

The findings presented in this study can be viewed as significant for investigating speech fluency and the usage patterns of fillers and hesitations by advanced Chinese learners when speaking English. By examining these features in a detailed and systematic manner, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how spontaneous L2 speech is structured and managed at higher proficiency levels. The types and frequencies of fillers and hesitations recorded in the participants' speech were generally consistent with the findings of previous studies on L2 speakers (e.g., Götz, 2013; Blankenship & Kay, 2015). However, certain peculiarities observed in this study may be attributed to the influence of the learners' first language, Chinese, suggesting a subtle yet notable role of L1 transfer in shaping L2 discourse strategies.

Filler Type Prevalence: A particularly interesting finding is the dominance of the fillers "um" and "un" among participants, as shown in Table 3. This pattern may reflect an influence from Chinese conversational norms, where similar filled pauses such as "那个" (nà ge) are frequently used to maintain the flow of speech while the speaker searches for the next word or idea. This observation supports Participant 8's remark: "I use 'um' the same way I use fillers in Chinese." Such cross-linguistic parallels indicate that learners may unconsciously employ pragmatic

strategies from their L1 when managing speech in their L2. This reinforces the notion that fillers are not merely random interruptions or speech errors, but are instead deeply embedded in the cognitive planning mechanisms that underlie real-time language processing (Galit et al., 2023).

These fillers and hesitations, far from being meaningless or irrelevant, are evident in the participants' oral communication and appear to play important roles in regulating several dimensions of L2 interaction. They serve cognitive functions by giving speakers time to plan; they serve discourse functions by signaling turn-taking and maintaining fluency; and they serve interpersonal functions by softening statements or expressing uncertainty. This supports the idea that such phenomena are not epiphenomenal but have functional and communicative value in spontaneous speech, as previously argued by Galit et al. (2023). The presence and variation of these features among participants further prove that L2 speech production is a complex, multifaceted process influenced by numerous interacting cognitive, linguistic, and social factors.

Attitudinal Impact: The range of participant attitudes toward the use of fillers and hesitations, as summarized in Table 3, reveals a pedagogical dilemma. While some students view fillers as useful tools for achieving more natural and native-like speech ("I think using some fillers makes my English sound more natural," said Participant 5), others associate excessive filler use with nervousness and a lack of fluency ("When I'm nervous, I use more fillers because I'm worried about making mistakes," said Participant 22). This divergence aligns with Götz's (2013) argument that filler usage, though natural and often necessary, requires targeted instructional attention in the language classroom to strike an appropriate balance between authenticity and clarity.

In this case, such attitudinal and behavioral influences should be taken seriously when designing pedagogical approaches aimed at developing fluency in advanced learners. The findings suggest that participants were not only aware of their use of fillers and hesitations, but also conscious of their potential impact on the listener's perception of fluency and competence. This raises the need for providing explicit guidance and structured practice on the effective use of hesitation phenomena in L2 speech. In line with earlier research (e.g., Götz, 2013), the present study supports the claim that fillers and hesitations deserve more attention in second language pedagogy, particularly when working with learners at advanced levels who aim to achieve more natural, fluent, and listener-friendly speech.

5. Conclusion

(1) Major findings

This study has yielded several key findings regarding the use of fillers and hesitations by English-major students in spontaneous oral production. The analysis of the participants' speech revealed observable patterns that offer insight into the nature and function of these disfluencies in second language (L2) usage.

Firstly, the participants employed a range of fillers and hesitations, including content fillers (such as "you know," "I mean"), time fillers (such as "um," "uh"), and other hesitation phenomena like pauses and repetitions. Among these, the most commonly used type was the filled pause, which appeared frequently throughout the participants' spoken discourse. These patterns are not random; rather, they reflect typical cross-linguistic influences and suggest the presence of first language (L1) interference in L2 speech production. The influence of L1 plays a role in shaping how learners manage gaps in their speech and how they adapt to the demands of real-time communication.

Secondly, the study demonstrated that fillers and hesitations fulfilled multiple communicative purposes. These include cognitive-functional roles (such as allowing time for idea formulation), turn-maintaining functions (signaling the speaker's intention to continue), and pragmatic or interpersonal functions (such as softening statements or indicating uncertainty). These functions reveal that fillers are not merely signs of poor language control or

nervousness but can serve important communicative purposes. Therefore, they should be seen as part of a speaker's strategic toolkit in conversation, aiding in maintaining the flow and coherence of speech.

Thirdly, the findings indicate that the use of fillers and hesitations is influenced by several interrelated factors, including L1 transfer, the speaker's level of language proficiency, the complexity of the speaking task, and affective elements such as anxiety or confidence. These variables highlight that fluency in L2 production is a multifaceted concept that cannot be determined by speed or smoothness alone.

Finally, some participants showed an awareness of their filler usage and its effect on how their fluency is perceived by listeners. This self-awareness led to an expressed desire for more targeted instruction and feedback on how to use such elements appropriately. This suggests a pedagogical implication: that L2 learners can benefit from explicit teaching about the strategic use of fillers, rather than simply being discouraged from using them.

(2) Implications

These findings have several important implications for L2 pedagogy and research:

For language teachers:

- 1) Explicit instruction on the functions and strategic use of fillers and hesitations could benefit advanced learners.
- 2) Awareness-raising activities may help students develop meta cognitive skills for managing fluency in spontaneous speech.
- 3) Task design should consider how factors (e.g., topic familiarity and planning time) affect fillers and hesitations use.

For researchers:

- 1) Further investigation into the relationship between L1 and L2 filler use patterns is warranted.
- 2) Longitudinal studies could show how filler/hesitation use evolves as learners progress.
- 3) Cross-linguistic comparisons may reveal universal vs. language-specific aspects of L2 filler use.

(3) Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted:

- 1) The sample size was small and limited to one university, potentially limiting generalizability.
- 2) Only one speaking task type was used; different tasks may have elicited different patterns of fillers and hesitations use.
- 3) The study relied on self-report data for some aspects of filler use, which may not always accurately reflect actual speech behavior.
- 4) The coding of filler functions involved some subjective interpretation, though inter-rater reliability measures were employed.

(4) Suggestions for further research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research are proposed:

- 1) Larger-scale studies involving multiple universities and diverse L1 backgrounds to enhance generalizability. The current study's sample size and homogeneity limit the extent to which findings can be generalized. Future research should aim to include participants from various Chinese universities, different regions, and potentially learners with diverse first language backgrounds studying English. This broader sampling approach would provide more robust evidence regarding the patterns observed and potentially reveal additional factors influencing filler and hesitation use in L2 speech production.

2) Comparative studies examining fillers and hesitations use across different task types and proficiency levels. Such research could investigate how filler patterns vary between monologic versus dialogic tasks, prepared versus spontaneous speech, academic versus casual contexts, and among learners at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. These comparisons would help establish a more comprehensive understanding of how contextual and developmental factors shape hesitation phenomena in L2 speech.

3) Longitudinal research tracking changes in fillers and hesitations use as learners progress in their language studies. By following the same participants over extended periods (perhaps 1-3 years), researchers could document how individual patterns evolve with increasing proficiency, growing confidence, and expanded lexical resources. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of fluency features and potentially identify critical transition points in filler usage patterns.

4) Experimental studies investigating the effects of explicit instruction on strategic filler use. Controlled classroom interventions could evaluate whether targeted awareness-raising and practice activities improve learners' ability to deploy fillers more effectively and appropriately. These studies might compare pre-and post-instruction speech samples and assess both objective measures of filler use and subjective perceptions of fluency.

5) Cross-linguistic studies comparing fillers and hesitations patterns between Chinese and English to understand L1 influence better. Detailed analysis of the specific phonological, pragmatic, and discourse features of fillers in both languages would illuminate transfer processes and help distinguish universal cognitive constraints from language-specific conventions in hesitation phenomena.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the use of fillers and hesitations by advanced Chinese learners of English. These findings contribute to understanding L2 fluency development and have essential implications for the learning and teaching language. There is the need to engage in continuous research in order to enhance knowledge on the complex processes involved in L2 speech production, which will be instrumental in developing new approaches to enhance language fluency. Future investigations should build upon these initial findings, addressing methodological limitations and expanding the scope of inquiry to include broader populations and contextual factors that influence spontaneous speech production.

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