

# Use of filled pauses in L2 and L1 speech

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## Purpose

To analyze the differences in use of filled pauses in the discourse of second language (L2) and native (L1) English speakers

## Research Questions

- What are the quantitative differences in the use of filled pauses between L2 and L1 speakers?
- What are the qualitative differences in the use of filled pauses between L2 and L1 speakers?
- How do L2 and L1 speakers use filled pauses in their discursive strategies and what (if any) are the differences in this use?

## Literature Review

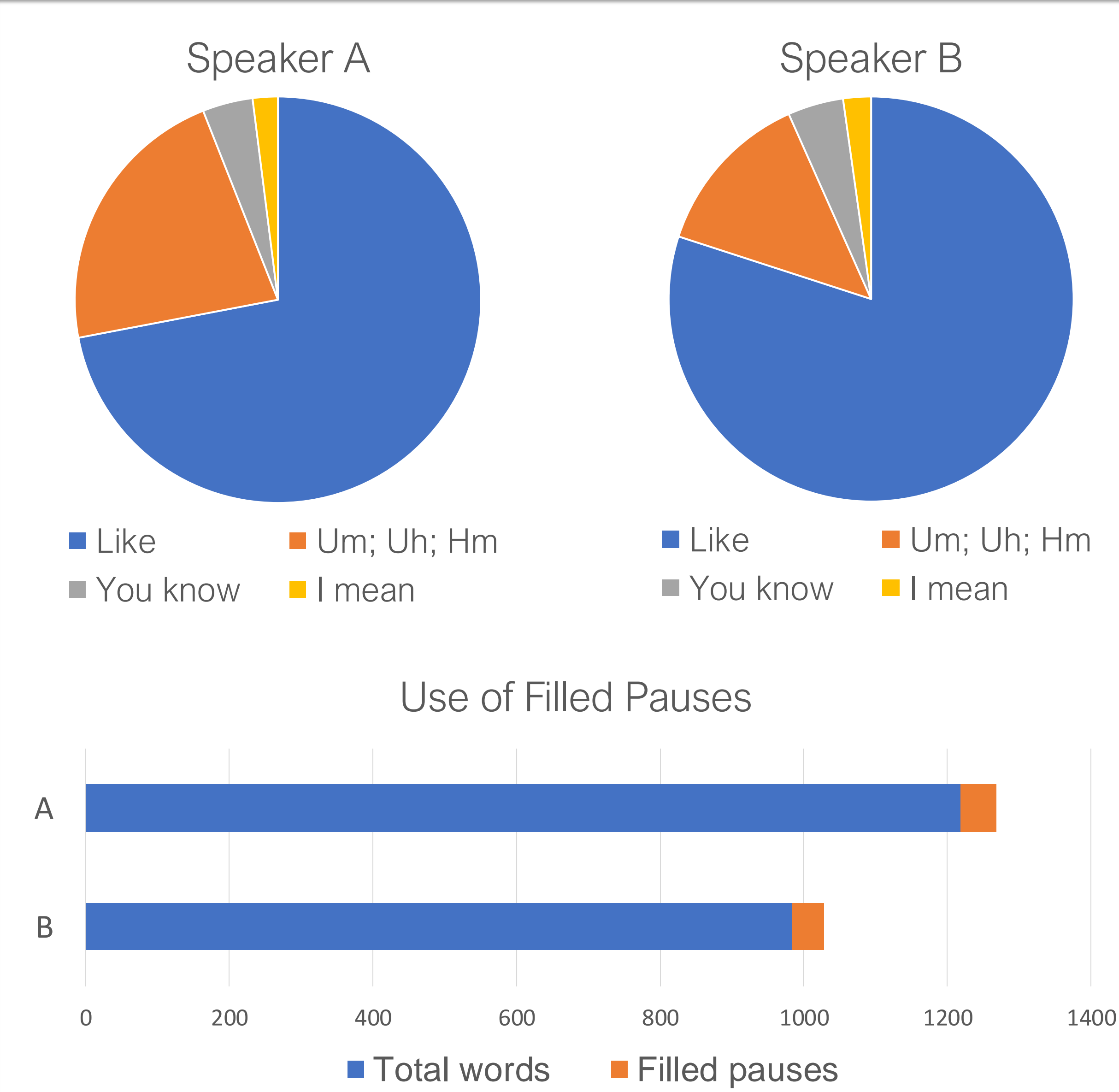
- Filled pauses can emphasize transitions in discourse
- Filled pauses can point to the complexity of upcoming phrases
- L2 speakers tend to pause in the middle of sentences. L1 speakers tend to pause at the end.
- L2 speakers rarely pause when using formulaic sentences (i.e. “have a nice day”)
- Listeners are more likely to estimate that speakers are unsure of what they’re talking if they use unfilled pauses

## Methodology

	Speaker A	Speaker B
Nationality	American	Brazilian
Native language	English	Portuguese
Age	20	26
Experience abroad	2 weeks in Ireland, 10 days in the Galapagos Islands	1 week in England, 15 months in the U.S.

- Two five-minute segments were recorded and transcribed.
- Filled pauses were counted from the transcripts.
- Words used as a part of a semantic structure (such as ‘like’ in a comparison) were disregarded
- The fillers “Um”, “Uh” and “Hm” were grouped together

## Results



- Difference in number of filled pauses was minimal between speakers (< 0.5%)
- B tended to use filled pauses in the middle of sentences more often than A.
- Both speakers used more pauses when telling stories, A more noticeably so
- Findings were consistent with the studies in the Literature Review

## Teaching Implications

- Use of filled pauses can be a sign of the cognitive difficulty of a communication task. Teachers that are aware of this can better assist students if they are having difficulties getting a point across
- Excessive number of pauses does not correlate with low proficiency in a language
- L2 speakers’ use of filled pauses in the middle of clauses can make speech seem “choppy”. If students feel that their speaking needs improvement, drawing their attention to this can help

## References

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