

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the context and importance of the research, as well as to develop a basic framework that will guide the entire research process. Thus, this chapter provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of the foundation, focus and objectives of the research to be conducted.

1.1 Background of the Study

Filler words are important to understand because they show how speakers organize their speech and thoughts when communicating, especially for foreign language learners. According to Baalen (2001), filler words can appear anywhere in speech and can be omitted without changing the message. Bygate (2016) adds that filler words such as “well”, “uh,” “um,” and “I mean” are used to fill pauses in speech. Erten (2014) refers them as discourse markers that appear when speakers are hesitant or thinking, while Richards and Schmidt (2012) emphasize that filler words help maintain fluency in speech. Thus, filler words are a natural element in oral communication that reflect the speaker's thought process and fluency.

In everyday life, people often use filler words without realizing it, whether in school, at work, or during casual talks. People usually use these words because they need a little time to think before they continue speaking. This is in line with Baalen's (2001) opinion that filler words can appear in different parts of a conversation without changing the main idea, and they help make communication smoother. In other words, filler words can help speakers keep the conversation going and reduce silence during speaking. Therefore, filler words are useful in everyday communication.

The researcher chooses to study filler words as the subject of this study because this linguistic component often appears in everyday conversation and

reflects how speakers organize their ideas or search for the right words before continuing the conversation. Examples of filler words include *uh*, *um*, *hmm*, *well*, *you know*, and *I mean*, which are commonly used in spontaneous speech. Thus, filler words play an important role in ensuring smooth communication, even though they are often seen as a sign of difficulty or discomfort when speaking. In addition, the use of filler words is closely related to the phenomenon of hesitation that occurs in spontaneous speech. According to Stenström (1994), the phenomenon of hesitation occurs when speakers have difficulty planning or producing speech directly. This phenomenon is not only found among students, but can also be found in entertainment media, such as movies or television series that attempt to depict everyday conversation naturally.

One example of a series which contains filler words is the Canadian series *Workin' Moms* by Catherine Reitman and Karen Moore (2017) on Netflix, which depicts the lives of working mothers balancing their careers and family roles. This series is relevant for analysis because it features natural, spontaneous, and expressive dialogue, which is in line with the characteristics of spontaneous speech in spoken interaction as discussed in Stenström's (1994) theory of spoken interaction. Furthermore, Levelt (1989) also stated that the emergence of filler words is related to the speech planning process and the cognitive load experienced by speakers when they have to think quickly. Therefore, this series is chosen as the object of research because it shows the use of filler words that reflect real social situations in everyday life.

The use of filler words reflects social reality, as the words often reflect how people express emotions, manage interactions, and build their social identities in everyday conversation. Filler words are not meaningless words. On the contrary they help speakers maintain the flow of communication and convey their attitudes. Previous research shows that the use of filler words is influenced by social and psychological factors, including age, gender, and personality, which reflect the speaker's identity and social background (Laserna, et.al, (2014) Ghanmi, (2022)). This supports the idea that filler words are not mere linguistic noise. However, meaningful elements within verbal interactions represent natural communication in

everyday life. In this case, analyzing filler words can reveal how language operates in everyday social contexts. Therefore, *Workin' Moms* is a relevant research object because it features spontaneous and expressive conversations that authentically depict social behavior and language use, while also being easily accessible through the globally popular Netflix platform.

Based on the above explanation, This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of spontaneous speech, particularly regarding how speakers organize their thoughts, manage uncertainty, and maintain fluency during communication. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to enrich research in psycholinguistics and other fields, particularly regarding the use of filler words in natural conversations depicted in audiovisual media.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of this study, the researcher identified the following issues and research question:

1. What are the types of filler words used in the *Workin' Moms* series?
2. What are the factors that influence the occurrence of fillers?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the issues raised in the research questions, the researcher formulated the following research objectives:

1. To identify the types of filler words used the *Workin' Moms* series
2. To explain the factors that influence the occurrence of fillers

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aims to discuss filler words by use psycholinguistics perspective. The results of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to society.

Theoretically, the study of filler words in the *Workin' Moms* series contributes to linguistic development by enriching our understanding of the types and factors of filler words in spoken communication. Therefore, the analysis of filler words in

this study not only deepens linguistic aspects but also provides insight into the mental processes and communication strategies of speakers in spoken interactions.

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to benefit the general public because filler words are naturally used by speakers in everyday communication, regardless of age, occupation, or language background. Understanding the use of filler words can help people become more aware of how speech is planned and produced during spontaneous interaction, as well as how filler words contribute to maintaining the flow of conversation. This awareness may improve communication by helping speakers express their ideas more naturally and confidently in various social and professional situations. Furthermore, the findings of this study may also serve as a reference for future researchers and anyone interested in understanding the characteristics of natural spoken interaction.

1.5 Scope and limitation of the study

This study focuses on psycholinguistics, specifically the use of filler words in spoken interaction. It analyzes the filler words produced by the female characters in the Netflix series *Workin' Moms*. The types of filler words are identified based on Stenström (1994) theory, while the psycholinguistic factors causing the occurrence of filler words are analyzed using Oomen and Postma (2001) theory.

This analysis is limited to the dialogues of the four main characters Kate, Anne, Frankie, and Jenny because they appear consistently throughout Season 1 and have the greatest amount of dialogue, providing sufficient data for analysis. Other characters are excluded because they only appear as supporting characters with limited speaking time, resulting in insufficient data for a comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, to keep the data manageable while allowing a more in-depth analysis, this study focuses only on Season 1, which consists of 13 episodes, and all episodes are used as the data source. This study does not examine filler words produced by characters, nonverbal expressions, or other linguistic features outside the category of filler words. By limiting the scope to the four main characters and one season, the researcher is able to conduct a more focused and detailed analysis that is consistent with the objectives of the study.