Using Fillers as Women's Language Markers in Conversation Found in Redeeming Love Movie

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the use of fillers in the Redeeming Love (2022) movie in terms of its types, functions, and possible causes of filler usage, especially in Angel's speech. Fillers, often dismissed as meaningless hesitations, carry pragmatic, psychological, and sociolinguistic functions that are particularly revealing when examined through gendered communication. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method using transcription data from selected scenes in the film. The data are taken from Redeeming Love movie and are analyzed using the theory of Rose (1998), Stenström (1994), and Duvall et al. (2014). The analysis identifies both lexical and non-lexical fillers, with significant emphasis on hesitation and emotional reinforcement. The findings suggest that Angel's use of fillers reflects internalized anxiety, social power imbalance, and identity negotiation—all of which are critical in interpreting women's speech patterns in patriarchal narrative structures. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of female language features in cinematic discourse.

Keywords: Conversation, Fillers, Gender, Redeeming Love, Women's language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's language is widely used in real life and is found in various media such as social media and magazines, or in literary works, as in movies. Their way of speaking differs to men's or even to child due to some linguistics forms they perform (Talbot & Malden, 2010). There are several language features possessed by women, such as fillers, tag questions, empty adjectives, correct colour terms, intensifiers, etc (Handayani & Linuwih, 2023). When speaking, people sometimes say a few words that contain pauses, usual fillers in their speech or even it happens when someone gets distracted in speaking (Aliyah & Hestrian, 2021). This can happen to people like native speakers or non-native speakers because spontaneous speaking is very difficult for some people. Therefore, people need a little time to think about what they want to say (Erten, 2014). Facing such situation, the speaker will say a word to cover up their confusion by using fillers to fill their pauses in speaking.

A filler is a seemingly meaningless word, phrase, or sound that marks a pause or hesitation during a speech or a conversation. Fillers are also known as gap fillers or forms of hesitation that indicates a speaker is thinking in their speech (Juliano et al., 2022). We, unconsciously, often stop for while during our talking because we think about what we are going to say. The stop does not take much times. The cause of the use of filler words can be one of the interesting things to observe. Therefore, the writer is interested in doing analysis about the use of filler by the the main character -Angel, in the movie "Redeeming Love." In addition, filler words are considered one of the best strategies to avoid gaps and sometimes cover up confusion during speech (Dlugan, 2011; Ranti et al., 2023). The writer finds movie's characters, especially female characters, use fillers in their utterances and it

grabs the writer's attention. That is why the writer takes Redeeming Love movie as her data source because she finds fillers are used very often during the conversations, especially by its female characters (Angel, Mirriam, and Lucky).

The research about using fillers in movie had been done by others researchers (Andriani, 2018; Damayanti et al., 2022; Tahir et al., 2022). Research about fillers in other media was also done, such as using fillers in presentation by (Ranti et al., 2023) or while doing a microteaching by (Afriyanti & Andini, 2020). The former research did not focus only to female characters but to both, while the later research focused on the occurrence of fillers during oral presentation by male and female students. That makes this research differs to the previous ones for this research focused on female characters in movie. While numerous studies have examined filler usage in natural conversations, fewer have explored how female characters in films employ fillers as linguistic strategies, especially in emotionally complex narratives. That is why this paper focuses on Angel, the main character in Redeeming Love, a film adaptation that narrates a woman's struggle for dignity and love in a patriarchal environment. Therefore, the writer will not take utterances from other characters. The research intends to analyze the types, functions, and causes of filler expressions in Angel's speech as a form of linguistic negotiation within gendered communication. Moreover, this study is important not only because it highlights female speech traits in film dialogue, but also because it frames filler usage as a meaningful socio-pragmatic act—rather than merely redundant hesitation. Drawing from theories of women's language and pragmatic functions of fillers, this research offers insights into how characters perform gender through their linguistic choices.

The linguistic characteristics that men and women employ differently are among the most obvious language disparities. Each has an own way of using a language. Gender disparities add diversity to a language because there are certainly differences in the speech patterns of men and women. But not every man and woman speaks in the same way. For instance, some women have a more masculine appearance and style when they speak, and some men have a feminine appearance and speaking style similar to that of women. As Lakoff (1975) stated that women do not use off color words or harsh expressions, but women are more experts in euphemisms. Men tend to want to look masculine and respected, and this makes men use harsh words more often than women. Meanwhile, women have a graceful image in society, this makes many women want to look good and classy, so the language they use seems more polite and formal (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

In addition, with the concept of gender, we can more easily describe and know the masculine and feminine behaviors that exist in men and women. In speaking, women may show their position in speech community by uttering some signals to perform their speaking style. These signals may occur varied, often by using question tags, various kinds of fillers, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers, and so on. These signals of women may cause them differ from men (Apridaningrum & Angelina, 2019). It is easy to be found women speak this way in our daily talk such as by uttering 'emm', 'hmmm', 'like', 'well', "I think", or 'isn't it?'. By uttering these signals or characteristics, their addressee consciously understand that women sometimes do not feel so comfortable or confident when saying something. They seem need support in their talk. That is why women may use filler in one conversation, otherwise they do not. It seems that the use of fillers in conversation may be as the communication strategy used by the speakers (Meylana et al., 2022).

Experts have defined fillers as a break in the flow of speech (Navratilova, 2015), or as markers used by the speakers in natural communication to fill the gap and minimize hesitation (Kharismawan, 2017; Santos et al., 2016), or whenever speaker wants to say something she/he unplanned before. Fillers will help the speakers mental to be strong in facing spoken discourse and help the speakers' readiness to speak and tell their ideas in a forum or discussion (Rajabi & Salami, 2016). To sum up, it

can be said that using fillers in conversation gives speakers time to think or avoid hesitated and give addressee opportunity to be ready for the next ideas uttered by speakers.

As women also often express uncertainty or lack of confidence using fillers while they are communicating with other people, their addressee comprehend that women may build their confident while taking stop. The use of fillers in both in speaking and writing may be common situation occurs in human conversation. Fillers are divided into two types (Rose, 1998) such as lexicalized fillers and unlexicalized fillers: a) Lexicalized fillers are fillers in the form of a short lexeme or phrases, while unlexicalized fillers are non-lexemes (non-words) filled pauses that are used by speakers to indicate their hesitation while the speaker thinks about next utterances to say. Lexical means filler refers to actual words. In this case, lexicalized fillers can consist of one or two words such as 'like', 'well', 'yeah', 'I mean', and so on. Other examples are 'if you know', 'according to', 'sort of', 'well', 'you see' (Holmes, 2013). B) Unlexicalized fillers are non-words or non-lexemes that are used when someone shows doubt during the speech. For example, 'Uhm', 'uh', 'err', 'ee', 'ah', 'um', and so on. This type of filler is often used when someone is confused and thinking about what to say next. Unlexicalized fillers are also more often spoken naturally and spontaneously (Amiridze et al., 2010).

Stenström (1994, as referenced in Afiifah, 2023) categorizes fillers into two types: silent pauses and filled pauses. A silent pause is an intentional break in speech without vocalization, often occurring mid-sentence as speakers plan their next utterance (Brown & Yule, 1983 as noted in Indriyana et al., 2021; Matthei & Roeper, 1983 as noted in Khusna, 2022); Wu, 2001). In contrast, a filled pause includes vocal sounds such as "uh," "err," or "ah," and typically emerges when speakers hesitate but continue speaking (Clarck & Clarck, 1977, as reported in Yulpia, 2025). These filled pauses function as placeholders while speakers organize their thoughts (Carter et al., 1997 as reported by Zulhemindra et al., 2022) and are also part of Rose's classification of fillers. Beyond their forms, fillers serve multiple communicative functions. Stenström (1994, as cited in Afiifah, 2023) outlines five main purposes: marking hesitation, empathizing with the listener, mitigating the impact of speech, editing or correcting errors, and creating time for thought. For instance, fillers like "um" or "err" reflect hesitation; "you know" or "right" signal empathy and check comprehension; "well" or "uhm" soften messages for politeness (Baalen, 2001, as referenced in Andriani, 2018); phrases like "I mean" help correct speech; and repetition aids speakers while they retrieve words or ideas.

The unpredictable nature of filler occurrence stems from the spontaneous character of speech, where speakers do not script their utterances but respond in real time. As Duvall et al., (2014) explain, three primary cognitive factors contribute to the use of fillers: divided attention, infrequent word use, and nervousness. Divided attention occurs when speakers are distracted or multi-tasking, causing them to lose focus mid-speech and insert fillers to regain fluency. Infrequent word use results in hesitations when speakers use unfamiliar vocabulary, leading to filler use while searching for the correct term (Goldwater et al., 2010). Nervousness, often a byproduct of both distractions and unfamiliarity, further prompts filler usage as speakers may lose their train of thought and rely on repetition or non-lexical fillers to maintain the conversational flow. Collectively, these cognitive pressures reveal how fillers are not random but function as adaptive tools to manage speech planning and interactional smoothness.

While previous studies have extensively examined fillers in spontaneous spoken discourse or conversational analysis, particularly in natural settings like interviews or daily conversation (e.g., Holmes, 2013), this study provides a novel perspective by focusing on cinematic female speech, which is often scripted but designed to emulate real-life communication. Furthermore, the integration of gender-pragmatic frameworks of Rose (1998, as cited in Afriyanti & Andini, 2020), Stenström (1994, as referenced in Afiifah, 2023), and Duvall et al. (2014) with the narrative analysis

of trauma and emotional expression adds depth to the analysis, distinguishing it from structural linguistic studies that treat fillers as neutral or solely functional. The study also introduces a diachronic narrative lens—tracing how filler use evolves alongside the protagonist's psychological transformation—an area that remains under-explored in gendered media discourse. Thus, the novelty lies in both the context (cinematic scripted dialogue) and the methodological approach (pragmatics-gender-discourse integration).

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the use of fillers in the speech of Angel, the female protagonist in Redeeming Love (Caruso, 2022). The goal is to understand how Angel's gender identity and psychological condition influence her discourse. As Creswell, 2018) explains, qualitative research focuses on interpreting meanings related to social or human issues through systematic data collection and analysis. The data were taken from emotionally significant scenes where Angel interacts with others, particularly male figures or authority characters. Three selection criteria were applied: the presence of fillers, the relevance to Angel's psychological development, and gendered interaction. The researcher transcribed the dialogue using pause-sensitive notation and analysed both verbal and non-verbal cues such as intonation, sighs, and hesitations. Fillers were categorized into lexical (e.g., "well," "I mean") and non-lexical (e.g., "uh," "um") types, based on Rose (1998). Each instance was timestamped, contextualized, and manually recorded to ensure depth and accuracy.

The analysis followed a multi-step coding process guided by gender-linguistic frameworks. Rose (1998) emphasized emotional suppression in patriarchal discourse, suggesting that Angel's fillers reflect identity struggle and emotional restraint. Stenström (1994, as cited in Afiifah, 2023) viewed fillers as performative features of gendered and youthful vernaculars, which aligns with Angel's conflicted persona. Duvall et al. (2014) further associated disfluencies with trauma, arguing that fragmented speech reveals internal distress—evident in Angel's frequent non-lexical fillers. The findings were interpreted thematically to identify patterns linked to her development, gendered dynamics, and the film's narrative. Although the study is limited to one character and is non-quantitative, Angel's central role provides a rich basis for understanding how linguistic features like fillers convey psychological and social dimensions. Focusing solely on Angel strengthens the coherence and focus of the analysis, aligning with the study's gender-pragmatic objectives. Future research is recommended to include comparative studies involving multiple characters or films to explore broader gendered patterns in filler usage.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

After collecting data by watching the movie and dividing the utterances, the writer found 177 filler words uttered by three female characters in the "Redeeming Love" movie. Generally, the data she found had been grouped that focused on two types of fillers: lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers. The finding data is shown in the following table.

Table 1. The filler words uttered by three female characters in Redeeming Movie

Kinds of Filler	Filler word	Amount
Lexicalized Filler	Well	38
	Yeah	37
	Okay	13

	You know	8
	And then	4
	I guess	1
	And	6
	Like	1
	So	4
Unlexicalized Filler	Hmm	13
	Uh	42
	Em	1
	Mm	9
Total		177

Based on the table above, the three female characters in Redeeming Love movie utter fillers in their conversations. They utter both the lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers in which the lexicalized fillers occur much more than the unlexicalized fillers. The unlexicalized fillers find in this movie occurred not as the form of words, yet only as sounds. Therefore, they do not have any meaning. On the other hands, the lexicalized fillers are found in the movie as words or expressions uttered by the characters. Based on the table above, it can be seen that the lexicalized fillers in this movie not only emerge as single lexeme 'well' 'yeah' but also as phrase 'You know' 'and then' 'I guess'.

From the table above, it can be seen that the occurrence of 'well', 'yeah', and 'okay' as lexicalized fillers are much more than other in this type. They appear as 38, 37, and 13 times; while others appears less than that amount. Even, there are two fillers words appear only one as "I guess" and 'like'. The unlexicalized filler word 'em' appear only one, while 'hmm', 'uh', and 'mm' appear more than one in the conversation. It can be concluded that in conversation, the characters use the lexicalized filler word 'well' in order to empathizing and mitigate their addressee's feelings; while in the unlexicalized filler word the characters mostly try to correct the mistakes by saying 'uh' which appears much more than other unlexicalized filler words. As stated before, the writer will focus only on Angel's utterances.

3.2. Discussion

Based on the types of fillers used by Angel, the writer found that Angel uses two primary categories of fillers throughout the film: lexical fillers: "Well," "I mean," "like," "you know" and non-lexical fillers: "Uh," "Um," "Ahh," "Hmm". The non-lexical fillers appeared more frequently than lexical ones, especially in emotionally intense scenes such as when Angel is confronted, expresses doubt, or struggles with vulnerability, such as her interactions with Michael or flashbacks to past trauma. Lexical fillers appeared in scenes where Angel attempted to explain herself, soften her stance, or negotiate a relational conflict. This reflects a tendency toward internal emotional hesitation, aligning with Duvall et al.'s (2014) interpretation of disfluency as trauma-linked expression. In addition, These findings confirm that female speech often features both lexical and non-lexical fillers, in line with the studies of Lakoff (1975), who suggests that women tend to use more nuanced verbal signals to mitigate face-threatening acts or express inner hesitation.

For the functions of fillers in Angel's utterances, the writer found that each type of filler was not used arbitrarily but served communicative and psychological functions, such as: 1) Hesitation markers: "Um" and "uh" often signal uncertainty, fear, or emotional hesitation before responding to male authority figures (e.g.,

Michael or the preacher); 2) Turn-taking and delay: Fillers like "well…" were used to stall responses when Angel needed time to emotionally process a question or deflect pressure; 3) Emotion management: In key scenes, such as when Angel explains her past, she uses "I mean" and "like" to soften disclosures and frame vulnerability; 4) Mitigation or politeness strategy: To soften statements or delay rejection. These uses reveal how fillers help Angel negotiate her identity, manage emotional tension, and preserve a sense of agency in disempowering situations. Rather than weakening her speech, the fillers become strategic resources for navigating conflict. In other words, it can be said that fillers here function as tools of interpersonal negotiation. Rather than signaling a lack of fluency, they demonstrate Angel's affective burden and pragmatic awareness—particularly in managing power dynamics with male characters. This aligns with Holmes' (2013) assertion that women's language often seeks relational harmony through indirectness.

Next, for the causes of filler usage by Angel, the writer found that the frequent use of fillers in Angel's speech can be attributed to several underlying causes: 1) Because of psychological trauma: Angel's abusive past results in hesitation and fear of judgment, which manifests in filler-laden speech; 2) Because of power imbalance: Her inferior social role within a patriarchal context makes her speech cautious, indirect, and emotionally loaded; and 3) Because of identity negotiation: Angel's internal conflict between her past identity and her desire for redemption is linguistically represented through speech disfluencies. It can be said that these findings show that gendered language reflects broader social positioning. Angel's fillers are not linguistic flaws, but narrative strategies embedded in her gendered character arc. In cinematic storytelling, such usage can increase character authenticity while also inviting empathy from the audience. Furthermore, for distribution across contexts the writer found that fillers were more frequent in dialogues with male characters (especially Michael and Paul), occurred in moments of self-revelation or confrontation, and in scenes involving moral judgment or fear of rejection. This suggests that Angel's filler usage correlates strongly with gendered power asymmetries and relational vulnerability, supporting Rose (1998) and Holmes (2013) on the link between emotional labor and female discourse patterns. Notably, the frequency and type of fillers shift as the narrative progresses. In the early scenes, Angel uses many non-lexical fillers in quick succession, indicating deep psychological restraint. Toward the end, lexical fillers increase, paired with more coherent speech structure, showing an evolution in self-confidence and emotional resolution. This transition can be interpreted as linguistic evidence of character development, where filler usage maps onto Angel's journey from trauma to empowerment.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of fillers in the speech of Angel, the female protagonist in the film Redeeming Love, using a gender-linguistic framework. The analysis revealed that Angel employs both lexical and non-lexical fillers, with a dominant presence of hesitation markers and emotionally expressive pauses. These fillers function not merely as signs of disfluency but as pragmatic devices that reflect her psychological trauma, social powerlessness, and identity negotiation. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to the growing discourse on women's language, especially in fictional narratives. The study supports and extends the claims of Lakoff (1975) and Holmes (2013) that filler usage among female speakers often carries affective and strategic meaning, rather than indicating inferiority or lack of coherence. In film studies, the findings demonstrate how linguistic nuances can shape the depth of character portrayal, offering insights for both literary scholars and screenwriters. Practically, this research encourages more nuanced readings of female characters in visual media, particularly in recognizing the role of micro-linguistic features in conveying internal conflict and gender dynamics. The implications also extend to sociolinguistic pedagogy, suggesting that fillers should be taught as functional elements rather than dismissed as verbal noise.

By analysing fillers in a scripted context rather than spontaneous conversation, this study broadens the scope of gender-linguistic analysis and offers a unique intersection between media representation and pragmatic function. However, the study has several limitations. It focuses on a single character from a single film and does not employ comparative analysis with male speech. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable across populations, genres, or genders. Furthermore, it relies solely on qualitative interpretation without frequency-based quantification. Future research may expand this inquiry by analysing multiple female characters across genres, incorporating corpus-based methods, or examining filler use in real-life versus scripted dialogue.

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