

Communicative Pauses in Thai
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1. Introduction

Pauses are defined as hesitation phenomena, speech habits characteristic of individuals (Goldman-Eisler, 1961). Hesitation pauses are considered a paralinguistic speech behavior, and are a very basic feature in linguistic performance. There are two types of hesitation pauses involved in speech production. They are filled and unfilled pauses. Both types of pauses are generally regarded as "normal" and "common" linguistic phenomena in every language. A pilot study which used German conversations primarily investigated filled pauses. The result of this study showed that filled pauses are commonly shared among speakers of different native languages. It also showed those which are typical to German, such as *also*, *naja*. In this study, filled pauses used in spontaneous Thai conversational interaction are presented. It is shown that these filled pauses are distributed in the form of sounds common to all languages, as well as sounds typical in Thai, such as, *hm*, *ʔa*, *kha*, *[tɛ̃ːt̃u]* and that these pauses are phenomena of significance in human communication whether Thai is used as a first or second language.

2. Method of Study

2.1. Subjects of The Study

There are 14 subjects; 6 are native speakers including myself, and 8 are non-native speakers. All native speakers are female, as well as 5 of the non-native speakers (1 American, 1 Frisian, 1 German, 1 Chinese and 1 Japanese) with 3 males (2 French and 1 American). Their age varies from 27 to 44. All of them are college graduates. They all have had opportunities to interact in Thai and English with speakers of different first languages.

2.2. Data

The data used in this study is spontaneous conversational Thai which is used as a first or second language among speakers in a natural setting.

The number of participant-speakers vary due to the real situation of interaction at the available time. At least two interlocutors, one native speaker and one non-native speaker participated in the conversations. I, as a native speaker participated in every conversation; and I also made the tape recordings. In some conversations, more than two participant-interlocutors interacted. The conversations vary from 10 to 30 minutes depending on the situation. After each conversational interaction, oral interviews in Thai were given to non-native speakers in order to obtain certain socio-psychological and linguistic information from the subjects.

2.3. Analysing Data

Three prepausal linguistic features i.e. consonant clusters vs. single consonants, diphthongs vs. long vowels, and level tones vs. contour tones including number of syllables of a word which occur after pauses were investigated by contrasting the speech samples of native and non-native speakers.

Pauses which are phonetically manifested in conversations were auditorily analysed and transcribed by using an impressionistic transcription. The analysis

started with classification of the phonological words which occur after filled pauses into several types: from words of 1 syllable to words of 8 syllables. Word forms which relate to the number of syllables were investigated based on the assumption that complex words are also a significant cause of the distribution of pauses. Complex features of the first syllable of words significantly provoked pauses. Therefore, every linguistic feature of contrast in the first syllables of the phonological words which occur after pauses were intensively analysed. This analysis aims to obtain results based on the hypothesis that consonant clusters, diphthongs, long vowels and level tones cause the distribution of pauses significantly more frequently than single consonants, long vowels and contour tones, respectively. In the case of prepausal level tones, all five tones of Thai were primarily investigated; then, three level tones (low, mid, high) were put together, in contrast to that of the two contour tones (falling and rising). Statistical work, that is, calculations for those contrastive features in numbers and percentage were carried out individually and collectively. Tables of statistics could, finally, be abstracted out as significant evidence.

3. Results

The study provides statistical result on filled pauses used in speaking Thai in table 1. Two kinds of filled pauses/pause fillers are manifested: common filled pauses and Thai typical filled pauses.

Non-native speakers use a greater number of filled pauses than native speakers, 783 / 283. Non-native speakers use more common filled pauses than typical filled pauses, 67.69% / 32.31%, whereas native speakers use more typical filled pauses than common filled pauses, 60.42% / 39.58%. That is, non-native speakers use common filled pauses 35.38% more frequently than typical filled pauses, whereas, native speakers use typical filled pauses 20.84% more frequently than common filled pauses. Therefore, non-native speakers use common filled pauses 28.11% more frequently than native speakers who, inversely, use typical filled pauses in Thai 28.11% more frequently than non-native speakers.

Table 1. Filled Pauses in Thai

	Native Speakers		Non-native Speakers	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total Number of Filled Pauses	283		783	
Common Filled Pauses	112	39.58	530	67.69
Thai Typical Filled Pauses	171	60.42	253	32.31

1). Common Filled Pauses

Common filled pauses which are shared among native and non-native speakers of Thai in this study are *hm*, *ʔa*, *ʔɔ*. Table 2 shows the statistical results of their distribution. Non-native speakers distributed the common filled pauses *hm*, *ʔa*, *ʔɔ* in 53.77% of the time and, 14.19% more frequently than the native speakers who used it 39.58% of the time. Of the three utterances, both native and non-native speakers similarly distribute filled pause *hm* the most frequently; and non-native speakers distribute it 4.13% more frequently than native speakers.

Table 2. Common Filled Pauses

Filled Pauses	Native Speakers		Non-native Speakers	
	Total Number	%	Total Number	%
	283		783	
hm	57	20.14	190	24.27
ʔa	13	4.59	153	19.54
ʔɔ	42	14.84	78	9.96
	112	39.58	421	53.77
ʔæ (Y)			95	12.13
o.k. (DM.) & (\$)			7	0.89
ʔe (Y)			3	0.38
hɔʔ (DM.)			2	0.26
ya (\$)			1	0.13
sɔ.sɔ (FR.)			1	0.13
	112	39.58	530	67.69

Note: Y = Japanese speaker \$ = American speaker

DM. = German speaker FR. = French speaker

It is noted that the sounds ʔæ, o.k., ʔe, [hɔʔ], ya and [sɔ.sɔ] are used only by 5 of the 8 non-native speakers, Japanese, German, American and French, respectively. These sounds are probably borrowed from their first language.

2). Thai Typical Filled Pauses

Typical filled pauses in Thai which are used among native and non-native speakers of Thai are *kha*, *rɔ*, *ʔɔ*, *ha*, and those which are uniquely perceived in phonetic realisation are [tʰā̌, kɔ̌:]. These filled pauses, typical to Thai have traditionally been interpreted as having particular grammatical functions (Haas, 1964, Burusphat, 1991, Phanuphong, 1981, Janphen, 1988, Thonglor, 1982). For example, *kha* as well as [kʰā̌p] have been defined as a "particle" (Haas, 1964), for female and male, respectively, whereas, [kɔ̌:] functions as a linker (Burusphat, 1991). These filled pauses are used as linguistic signs connoting a reply or response from the individual speakers.

Among the filled pauses mentioned above, (table 3), native speakers use these utterances 53.71% of the time and, 23.70% more frequently than non-native speakers who used them 30.01%. Nevertheless, native speakers distribute all of the typical filled pauses in Thai 60.42% and, 28.11% more frequently than non-native speakers who distribute them 32.31%.

Table 3. Thai Typical Filled Pauses

Filled Pauses	Native Speakers		Non-native Speakers	
	Total Number	%	Total Number	%
	283		783	
kha	50	17.67	72	9.20
tɕ hāi	22	7.77	88	11.24
ʔo	36	12.72	32	4.09
rɔ	20	7.07	0	0.77
hɔʔ	16	5.65	27	3.45
ha	8	2.83	10	1.28
	152	53.71	235	30.01
kʰur	9	3.18		
lɛw	5	1.77		
kʰap			4	0.51
nɔʔ			3	0.38
bɛp	2	0.71		
hɔʔj	1	0.35		
ʔu			1	0.13
kʰaʔ hui			1	0.13
kʰaʔ ʔaʔ			1	0.13
tɕʰai hui			1	0.13
tɕʰai hui			1	0.13
tɕʰai ʔo			1	0.13
ʔɔʔ ʔaʔ			1	0.13
ʔɔʔ hui	1	0.35		
ʔɔʔ o.k.			2	0.26
hui tɕʰai			2	0.26
hui ʔɔʔ	1	0.35		
	171	60.42	253	32.31

Female native speakers used the filled pause *kha* (including its variation which is phonetically realised as $[kʰaʔ]$) the most frequently whereas, non-native speakers used the filled pause $[tɕʰai]$ the most frequently.

Table 3 shows all contrastive distributions of the typical filled pauses in Thai and particularly, *kha* and $[tɕʰai]$ between native and non-native speakers. Accordingly, native speakers distribute *kha* 8.47% more frequently than do non-native speakers whereas, the later ones distribute $[tɕʰai]$ 3.47% more frequently than the former. The filled pause $[tɕʰai]$ may be neutral and easier for non-native speakers to express. Interestingly, an American, male used $[kʰap]$ which connotes social status for male. Interestingly, "mixed" filled pauses between common and typical filled pauses occur in this study. Speakers, mostly non-native mix their familiar sounds with those which are typical to Thai. Those non-native speakers are all female, American,

German, Frisian, and are speakers of Indo-European first languages: English, German and Frisian, a language found in the Netherlands. The mixed filled pauses are, such as [k^hʔ.hm̩, k^hʔ.ʔʔ, ʔʔ.o.k., hm̩.ʔʔ].

3.2. Distributions of Filled Pauses

Filled pauses of both common and typical types are used in isolation, in conversational overlapping and at turn-taking, and within conversational turns, before linguistic features.

According to table 4, native speakers distribute filled pauses in isolation 8.16% more frequently than non-native speakers.

Table 4. Filled Pauses in Isolations

	Native Speakers	Non-native Speakers
Total number of filled pauses	283	783
Filled pauses in isolation	129	293
%	45.58	37.42

Linguistic features which provoked filled pauses are consonant clusters, diphthongs, long vowels, level tones and multi-syllabic words. According to the statistical results in table 5, non-native speakers used filled pauses before every linguistic features mentioned more frequently than native speakers, 8.19%, 6.71%, 5.44%, 5.33% and 5.77%, respectively.

Table 5. Filled Pauses before Linguistic Features

Linguistic Features	Native Speakers			Non-native Speakers		
	Total Number in Text	Filled Pauses	%	Total Number in Text	Filled Pauses	%
Clusters	111	5	4.50	134	17	12.69
Diphthongs	713	23	3.23	1036	103	9.94
Long vowels	1259	40	3.18	1763	152	8.62
Level tones	1955	75	3.84	2498	229	9.17
Number of syllables of a word	2933	98	3.34	4017	360	9.11

4. Discussion

This investigation reports that filled pauses occur as a vocal hesitation device occupying a full response formula when used in isolation and an interrupted speech unit when used within conversational turn-utterances.

Hesitation phenomenon of filled pauses are normal in spontaneous speech. During the production of spontaneous speech as in Thai conversations, difficulties can naturally arise. The statistical results of this study show that there are significant difficulties. Difficulties which provoke filled pauses mainly arise from specific linguistic characteristics in Thai. These are consonant clusters, diphthongs, long vowels, level tones and multi-syllabic words. The production of these features motivate phonotactic constraints due to the difficulty in moving articulatory

mechanisms for the complex cooperation of linguistic elements under the modification of prosodic features. Prosodies modify the process of the production of these features as accompaniment or property of the syllable as a whole (Henderson, 1970). Producing those complex linguistic features in Thai, speakers require greater effort in the movements of the articulators: shape of the configuration of the vocal tract, vibration of vocal cords and muscular tension of the tongue.

Specific characteristics of consonant clusters, diphthongs, long vowels, level tones and word forms in Thai are considered unnatural, nonautomatic. They make verbal production and comprehension difficult. These features correlate with certain prosodies in exhibiting their significant characteristics. These characteristics are described in the following paragraph.

Clusters are universally phonotactic constraints (James, 1986, Greenberg, 1978). Specifically, consonant clusters in Thai have a restricted occurrence. Diphthongs, two vowel gliding operate in a restricted space of the vowel system with no complete closure. Long vowels operate under length which makes up another distinctive vowel of the same quality. Level tones exhibit stable or monotonous pitch movements. Level tones are, thus, far from the "natural" pitch as falling and rising tones which show different movements of pitch (Ohala, 1978 and Collier, 1984). Words in Thai may also be created and expanded in the order of single-syllable or monosyllabic words under compounding processes or, using Diller's term 'compound of compounds' (Diller, 1987: 12). These processes require "habit forming" of the word orders which are restricted by the structural regularities of Thai and are modified with certain prosodic features which stretch over and link the syllables of the words together.

The production process for utterances containing complex features are naturally difficult. The difficulty of language processing for those features relate to cognitive factors. Speakers are consciously aware of transmitting the message; their verbal production becomes as such, nonautomatic, unnatural or interrupted. Speakers, particularly non-native, have to adjust and reactivate their articulatory mechanisms in order to produce the specific "patterns" of the language. In doing this, speakers require, as Abercrombie (1967) states, "speech habit characteristics" of the language which may be hard and unfamiliar for their pre-cognitive and vocal processes.

Filled pauses used in conversational interaction, as in this study, exhibit their primary function in human communication. They are produced in one word utterances or in repetitive or combinative forms of the sounds. This form of sounds is transparent and simple and hence, can be considered natural phenomenon (Dressler, 1985). Simplicity is naturally preferable for everyday interaction among speakers, native or non-native. Speakers, particularly, the adult non-native prefer simple forms like "new baby talk formation" (Ferguson, 1978: 211). This "simplification" characterizes universals of human languages (Kiparsky, 1978) which facilitates acquisition of the first as well as a second language. Phonological simplification through the simple form of utterances as filled pauses ease common difficulties resulting from language production mechanisms (Dressler and Tonelli, 1984).

Filled pauses transmit a back-feed channel cue. They are perceived as a response which feeds back the speaker's turn-utterances from his/her participant-

hearer. These verbal cues in the form of vocal sounds signal the attention of participants. Participant-speakers send out filled pauses in order to keep the "floor" of conversational communication. They constitute a speaking turn and show that they are there, and actively participating in the interaction.

Filled pauses signify a cultural learning. In conversational interaction in Thai, these small and simple sounds have conventionally been used as a product of language community. The use of common filled pauses affirms a universal product of culture across human languages. Filled pauses have been acquired and even applied by mixing the sounds, such as [*tɕ^hai.mi*, ?ɕ^h.mi] by either native or non-native speakers. The very natural use of filled pauses reflects "cultural absorption" in the speaking environment of the target language. Speakers learn to use appropriate elements which correspond to the face-to-face communication situation in their first or second language. Moreover, speakers fall back on their first language when they interact in their second language. Certain filled pauses found in this study, such as *o.k.*, ?ɕ^h reflect a switching transfer of linguistic elements of the native language to the second language. These simplified utterances, as Hawkin (1988) and Butterworth (1980) claim, reflect the limited capacity of human language production as well.

Filled pauses reflect the psychological state of speakers when speakers are confronted with uncertainty or difficulty. They are also a reaction to their own prolonged silences (Goldman-Eisler, 1961). The small sounds of filled pauses relate to emotional factors of individual speakers. They contribute to an impression of hesitancy. Speakers are inclined to delay using utterances which are perceived as boring and annoying habits of speakers. Filled pauses as vocal devices fall, thus, into categories of nonfluencies (Tubbs and Moss, 1994: 316). Speakers also avoid their language incompetence by consciously sending out simplified and automatic cues of filled pauses. However, filled pauses are also used in appealing for assistance from and encouraging the interactants to put additional effort into comprehending a second language speaker, and to support and carry the communication situation.

5. Conclusion

Filled pauses are a common and natural phenomenon in spontaneous Thai conversations. The use of filled pauses manifest themselves in a simple but effective paralinguistic devices. These can be considered the best way to cross human communication, particularly in face-to-face interaction. Simplicity is universally preferable and it makes communication, in both intercultural and within the same culture interactions, economical and "to-the-point." These simple forms of filled pauses are used as a speech strategy to overcome difficulties of speech production. Hence they reflect the state of mind of a speaker who is consciously aware of controlling his/her own language processing. These linguistic cues are a learned product of the language community. Filled pauses, nevertheless, underlie and direct individual-human social behavior.

6. References

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