TOFEDU: The Future of Education Journal
Volume 5 Number 4 (2026) Page: 6087-6092
E-ISSN 2961-7553 P-ISSN 2963-8135
https://journal.tofedu.or.id/index.php/journal/index

Speech Errors in Dialogue of the Pursuit of Happyness Movie: a Psycholinguistics Analysis

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ABSTRACT
This study analyzes speech errors found in the movie The Pursuit of Happyness. Its objective is to identify the forms of speech errors and the conditions that trigger their occurrence. The purpose of this research is to identify the dominant patterns of speech errors and examine the potential conditions causing these errors in the dialogue of the film. This study employs a theoretical research framework using a qualitative, descriptive method and a psycholinguistic approach. Using theory of Clark and Clark (1977). Data consisting of the protagonist's dialogue were obtained from reliable sources and gathered through documentation and note-taking; they were subsequently analyzed using content analysis, involving stages of identification, description, classification, and explanation. The study found that: 1.) The study identified several forms of speech errors: filled pauses were the most dominant, followed by repetitions and interjections, while stammers were the least frequent, and no slips of the tongue were found. 2.) The prevalence of filled pauses is linked to the emotional stress and the vast amount of information Chris the protagonist had to process, including financial instability, child-rearing responsibilities, and homelessness, all of which compounded the complexity of his life challenges. 3.) The study also identified three conditions associated with the occurrence of speech errors: cognitive difficulty, situational anxiety, and social circumstances. This study contributes to the field of psycholinguistics by demonstrating that speech errors are linked not only to cognitive processes and speech production but also to emotional stress, situational conditions, and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: : speech errors, psycholinguistic analysis, The Pursuit of Happynes

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary medium for conveying ideas, feelings, and information during social interaction. In the process of producing speech, speakers are not always able to articulate their thoughts fluently in accordance with their initial intentions. Such disfluencies may manifest as pauses, repetitions, stutters, interjections, or alterations to the structure of an utterance. Studying these phenomena is significant, as it offers insight into the cognitive processes of language planning and production that occur when an individual speaks.

Psycholinguistics examines the relationship between language and human mental processes, including how messages are planned, formulated, and realized as speech. Clark and Clark (1977) identified various types of speech errors that can be used to categorize deviations from intended utterances. Meanwhile, Levelt's (1989) model of language production explains that speech involves a sequence of processes, ranging from the formation of an intention to the final act of articulation. In situations characterized by high cognitive load or emotional pressure, speakers may require additional time to construct their messages, making disfluencies more apparent.

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135

Previous research has explored speech errors across various contexts. Yahya (2022), for instance, examined speech errors in the television program My English Puberty 100 Hours and found that repetition was the most prevalent form, primarily driven by cognitive difficulties. Sari (2023) analyzed dialogue from the film Frozen II and documented the occurrence of pauses and repetitions. Other studies concerning the film The Pursuit of Happyness have focused more on pragmatic and social dimensions, such as directive speech acts (Dehans, 2019), politeness strategies (Trifany & Rohana, 2023), and strategies involving (im)politeness within the context of job interviews (Tse, 2024). Although the film The Pursuit of Happyness has been analyzed from various perspectives, a study that specifically maps types of speech errors while linking them to cognitive, emotional, and social conditions remains highly relevant. The film features the character Chris Gardner, who grapples with economic instability, the responsibilities of child-rearing, homelessness, and the pressures of a demanding work environment. These circumstances provide a context for observing how speech disfluencies manifest across various interactions.

Addressing this research gap, this study seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of speech errors are present in the dialogue of The Pursuit of Happyness and (2) What conditions might be associated with the occurrence of these speech errors? The novelty of this research lies in its application of the classification system developed by Clark and Clark (1977) to the film's dialogue, combined with a contextual analysis of three specific conditions: cognitive difficulty, situational anxiety, and social circumstances.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design with a psycholinguistic approach. The primary data source consists of the dialogue from the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, directed by Gabriele Muccino and released in 2006. The data comprise utterances containing speech errors specifically those produced by the protagonist, Chris Gardner examined within the context of his interactions with other characters.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and note-taking. The film was viewed repeatedly, the dialogue was transcribed, and utterances exhibiting disfluency were identified, along with their respective contexts and timestamps. The unit of analysis is defined as a segment of speech produced by a speaker during a single conversational turn that contains at least one instance of a speech error.

Data analysis was carried out in four stages: identification, description, classification, and explanation. Each relevant utterance was identified, the form of disfluency was described, and it was then classified according to the nine categories established by Clark and Clark (1977): silent pauses, filled pauses, stammers, slips of the tongue, corrections, interjections, retraced false starts, unretraced false starts, and repetitions. The frequency of each category was tabulated to identify dominant patterns. Subsequently, the context of each scene was interpreted with reference to three conditions discussed within the research framework:
cognitive difficulty, situational anxiety, and social circumstances. These interpretations are strictly contextual and are not intended as psychological diagnoses of the characters

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Based on the data from the study, there are 222 occurrences of speech errors in the film dialogue. Filled pauses constitute the most frequent category, followed by repetitions. The detailed distribution is presented in Table 1.

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135

No.	Types of Speech Errors	Frequency
1	Filled pause	110
2	Silent pause	13
3	Stammer	2
4	Slip of the tongue	0
5	Correction	0
6	interjection	17
7	False start retraced	5
8	False start un-retraced	13
9	Repeat	62
	Total	**222**

Table 1. Distribution of types of speech errors in The Pursuit of Happyness

Filled pauses account for 110 occurrences, or approximately 49.5% of the total data. These manifest as fillers such as "uh" and "um," which can provide the speaker with additional time to plan the next part of their utterance. In the dialogue—whether Chris is answering his child's questions, negotiating with a potential client, or speaking to a job recruiter—these fillers appear as he formulates his responses in situations that demand an immediate reply.

Repetitions rank second, with 62 occurrences. Examples include instances like "to… to discuss it with you," as well as other repeated words or phrases throughout Chris's speech. Such repetitions may indicate that the speaker is maintaining their turn in the conversation while preparing the continuation of their message. Interjections appear 17 times, while silent pauses and non-repetitive utterance initiations each occur 13 times. There are 5 instances of "restart" utterances, and 2 instances of stuttering. No slips of the tongue or self-corrections were identified in the study.

The prevalence of filled pauses and repetitions suggests that the data from this film is primarily characterized by forms of disfluency that allow the speaker time to process or construct their speech. However, the frequency of these occurrences does not, in itself, prove a specific psychological cause. Therefore, the following interpretation takes into account the context of the dialogue and the situations depicted in the film.

Discussion

Conditions Related to Speech Errors

The research analysis identifies three conditions associated with speech errors: cognitive difficulty, situational anxiety, and social circumstances. These are understood as interpretive categories based on the context of the scene, rather than as standalone quantitative measures.

Cognitive difficulty is evident when Chris needs to organize information or formulate complex responses. For instance, while explaining his work experience to Jay Twistle, Chris uses pauses and repetitions as he structures the sequence of information regarding his time in the Navy. Such speech patterns indicate that the speaker is attempting to maintain the flow of his explanation while simultaneously planning the next part of his utterance. This pattern aligns with the view of Clark and Clark (1977) that the demands of speech planning can be linked to disfluency.

Furthermore, situational anxiety is apparent in scenes where Chris faces urgent pressure such as when he struggles to finalize the sale of a malfunctioning scanner, or discovers that his money has been seized for tax payments. In these instances, his speech contains pauses, repetitions, and interrupted starts. This context suggests that situational pressure can coincide with the difficulty of planning speech fluently.

In addition, social circumstances are observed in interactions involving status-related or professional demands, particularly when Chris speaks with recruiters or potential clients. During

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135

a job interview, for example, he strives to demonstrate competence while answering the interviewer's questions. The use of fillers and pauses in such contexts can be interpreted as part of the effort to construct responses under social pressure. Thus, speech errors in the film occur not only in personal conversations but also in professional communications that require a high degree of caution.

Overall, these three conditions may overlap. A single utterance containing pauses or repetitions can arise when a speaker simultaneously faces an information load, emotional pressure, and social demands. Therefore, the relationship between types of speech errors and the conditions that trigger them should be explained through context, rather than being treated as an absolute cause-and-effect relationship.

Analysis of Speech errors examples

The following examples demonstrate how the categories of form and the context of an utterance can be interpreted in conjunction. The excerpts are drawn from the data and analysis presented in the thesis; their interpretation remains constrained by the context of the scene, as film dialogue cannot directly reveal a character's mental state.

Cognitive Difficulties: Formulating Reasons and Choosing Words

The following examples demonstrate how the categories of form and the context of an utterance can be interpreted in conjunction. The excerpts are drawn from the data and analysis presented in the thesis; their interpretation remains constrained by the context of the scene, as film dialogue cannot directly reveal a character's mental state.

"Uh, you know, when I... when I was a kid, I could go through a... a math book in the week..." (00:10:45–00:11:05)

In the scene where Chris explains to Linda that he wants to pursue a job at a brokerage firm, his speech contains a filled pause "uh" as well as repetitions, such as "when I… when I" and "a… a math book." These elements emerge as Chris attempts to articulate the connection between his childhood mathematical aptitude and his interest in this new career path. He is not merely conveying factual information; he also needs to formulate a rationale that Linda will understand. The repetitions provide extra time to structure the remainder of his utterance, while the filled pause signals that his turn at talk is still ongoing, even though his intended message has not yet been fully mapped out. Within the framework proposed by Clark and Clark (1977), these instances can be interpreted as disfluencies stemming from the demands of message planning and the search for appropriate linguistic forms.

"Yeah, that's spelled right. That's not part of the motto, so you're not supposed to learn that. That's an adult word to show anger and um... other things." (00:16:41–00:17:01)

Another example arises when Christopher asks about an inappropriate word written on a wall near his daycare. Chris responds by explaining what the word is. A filler an "um" occurs as Chris attempts to explain the meaning of the word to his child without being overly explicit. In this instance, the cognitive load is linked not only to the search for vocabulary but also to the selection of an explanation appropriate for the listener's age. Thus, the cognitive difficulty in this data can be understood as an effort to align the content of the message with communicative needs.

Situational anxiety: pressure that disrupts the fluency of speech

"No. No, I... I can't... I can't spend the night here. I... I have to pick up my son." (00:38:49–00:39:45)

A compelling example occurs in the scene where Chris is taken to the police station due to unpaid parking tickets. Upon realizing he must remain there. The repetition of "No" and "I," along with utterances that are interrupted before being resumed, occurs as Chris attempts to explain two urgent matters: he has a job interview the following morning and needs to pick up his child. Given this context, situational anxiety serves as a plausible interpretation, as Chris's attention

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135

appears divided between explaining his situation to the police and finding a way to fulfill his parental responsibilities. The repetition also demonstrates his persistent effort to convey his message, even as the conversation unfolds under significant pressure.

"Um… you gotta get Christopher, uh, from daycare. I can't… um… just keep him for the night, and I'm gonna… I… and, uh, just one night." (00:39:48–00:40:56)

A similar pattern emerges when Chris calls Linda to ask if she can look after Christopher for the night. In this context, Chris finds himself needing to seek help from someone who has previously refused him or with whom there is underlying tension. The use of filled pauses, repetitions, and shifting starts to his utterances highlights the difficulty he faces in formulating this urgent request. Nevertheless, these data should be interpreted as reflecting a contextual link between situational pressure and disfluent speech, rather than as definitive proof that anxiety is the sole cause.

Social circumstances: professional hierarchy and self-image management

"I thought I'd uh, uh… wear a shirt today. Um… you know, being in the last day and all." (01:49:19–01:50:08)

The scene in which Chris meets with Mr. Frohm on the final day of his internship program illustrates the relationship between speech fluency and social hierarchy. When Mr. Frohm invites him to sit down and makes a remark about his attire, Chris responds. Frequent filled pauses occur as Chris speaks to someone who holds the authority to decide whether he will be hired as a broker. His speech sounds cautious, as he must grasp the purpose of the meeting while simultaneously maintaining a professional impression. Once Mr. Frohm confirms that Chris can begin working as a broker, Chris's response becomes brief: "Yes, sir." This contrast is significant, as it demonstrates that speech fluency can shift in response to the demands of an interaction and the nature of the information being processed.

"I was… I was wondering if… yeah, Osteo National. Right, uh, we can still…? Half an hour? Yes. Beautiful. Beautiful. Thank you, thank you." (00:20:08–00:20:21)

Another example of a social situation can be seen when Chris contacts a prospective client to confirm a meeting schedule. As a salesperson, Chris needs to sound convincing and maintain a professional rapport, while also adapting his speech based on the responses of the person on the other end of the line. The repetition of phrases like "I was," "Beautiful," and "Thank you," along with several pauses, reflects the process of managing turn-taking while securing an agreement. This example is noteworthy because disfluency does not imply an inability to communicate; Chris still successfully achieves the objective of the conversation. In other words, speech errors can occur alongside communicative success.

Implication of the findings

The A comparison of these examples demonstrates that similar types of speech errors can emerge under different conditions. Filled pauses such as "uh" or "um" may signal a search for the right word (e.g., when Chris explains his career plans to Linda), an effort to select an appropriate explanation (e.g., when speaking to his child), or a sense of caution (e.g., when interacting with a superior). Consequently, the form of the utterance alone is insufficient to determine the underlying cause; the conversational context, the speaker's intent, and the relationship between the participants must all be considered.

The finding that filled pauses (110 out of 222 instances) and repetitions (62 out of 222) are the most prevalent forms is consistent with the numerous instances in which Chris requires time to develop or adjust his message. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the categories of speech errors and the conditions associated with them: a single utterance may contain multiple types of disfluency, and a single form may be interpreted through more than one underlying condition. Therefore, it is more accurate to state that the data reveal contextual associations rather than definitive cause-and-effect relationships. A close examination of concrete examples

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135

reinforces the frequency-based findings by illustrating the functional role of these disfluencies within the interaction, rather than merely tallying their occurrences.

Conclusion

This study identified 222 instances of speech errors in the dialogue of the film *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Filled pauses were the most prevalent type, occurring 110 times, followed by repetitions, which appeared 62 times. There were 17 instances of interjections; silent pauses and fresh starts (without repetition) each occurred 13 times; there were 5 instances of retraced fresh starts, and 2 instances of stuttering. The analysis revealed no occurrences of slips of the tongue or self-corrections.

A contextual analysis links these speech errors to cognitive difficulties, situational anxiety, and social circumstances. Economic pressure, parental responsibilities, work-related issues, and interactions with authority figures are among the situational factors surrounding the protagonist's speech. These findings support the understanding that speech disfluencies can be examined as part of the speech-planning process within specific contexts.

This study is limited to a single film and the interpretation of transcribed dialogue; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all speakers in everyday communication. Future research could compare multiple films or data from spontaneous conversations, employ inter-rater reliability checks to enhance the consistency of classifications, and provide a more detailed breakdown of the frequency of each type of speech error.

Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to express gratitude to the supervisors, Dr. Diana Rozelin,S.S, M.Hum., and Putri Ayu Lestari, M.Hum for their guidance, support, and direction in completing this research. Furthermore, the researcher extends thanks to Sultan Thaha Saifuddin State Islamic University Jambi for providing the facilities and an excellent academic environment for conducting this study. Finally, it should be noted that this research has not been presented at any seminar or conference.

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E-ISSN 2961-7553
P-ISSN 2963-8135