**ARCHES Language School**

**Lesson:** Why do we, like, hesitate when we, um… speak?

**Lesson Text from:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsMWbVrjucg>

**Language Level:** B2+, C1

1. **Warm Up** (5 min)

* What’s a “pet word/phrase” in the speech, also called “fillers”? Have you heard about these terms?
* Why do you think these words/phrases are used in conversation?
* What’s the word for “pet word” in your first language?
* What are some common “pet words or fillers” in your first language?

**2. Vocabulary** (5 min)

**Directions:** Under your teacher’s supervision, get familiar with the meaning and pronunciation of the following words and phrases.

* **disfluency** (n.): interruptions in the regular flow of speech, such as using uh and um, pausing silently, repeating words, or interrupting oneself to correct something said previously. [*falta de fluidez*]
* **imbue** (v.): inspire or permeate with (a feeling or quality). [*imbuir*]
* **discourse markers** (n. ph.): a word or phrase whose function is to organize discourse into segments, for example *well* or *I mean*. [marcadores del discurso]
* **convey** (v.): to transmit, to communicate (a message or information). [*transmitir*]
* **conscientious** (adj.): causing or likely to cause an argument; controversial.
* **gauge** (v.): judge or assess (a situation, attitude, or feeling). [medir, evaluar]
* **dreaded** (adj.): regarded with great fear or apprehension. [*horrendo*]
* **cue** (v.): give a cue to or for. [*dar una pista*]
* **mastery** (n.): comprehensive knowledge or skill in a subject or accomplishment. [*dominio*]

**3. Comprehension** (10 min)

**3.1. General Comprehension**

**Question:** Is the author in favor or against the hesitation phenomena he describes in language?

**3.2. Specific Comprehension**

**Directions:** Watch again and answer the following specific questions about the video:

**a)** What was theAncient Greek and Latin texts view of this hesitation phenomena?

**b)** What did renowned linguist Noam Chomsky say about these expressions?

**c)** Are these language hesitation phenomena less common nowadays? How often do they occur in today’s conversations?

**d)** What are some of the possible meanings these so-called language fillers may have in spoken language?

**e)** Are the so-called language fillers appropriate in writing?

**4. Interpreting: Meaning in Context (Video Transcript)** (10 min)

**Directions:** Under your teacher’s supervision, read the video transcript outload for correction purposes. As you read, say in your own words what you think the author meant by the phrases in **bold**. Make sure to analyze the context in which each of the bolded sentences appear.

*For as long as we’ve had language, some people have tried to control it.* ***And some of the most frequent targets of this communication regulation are the “ums”, “ers”, and “likes” that pepper our conversations****. Ancient Greek and Latin texts warned against speaking with hesitation, modern schools have tried to ban the offending terms, and renowned linguist Noam Chomsky dismissed these expressions as “errors” irrelevant to language. Historically, these speech components had been lumped into the broader bucket of “disfluencies”— linguistic fillers which distract from useful speech.* ***However, none of this controversy has made these so-called disfluencies less common****. They continue to occur roughly 2 to 3 times per minute in natural speech. And different versions of them can be found in almost every language, including sign language. So, are “ums” and “uhs” just a habit we can’t break? Or is there more to them than meets the ear?*

*To answer this question, it helps to compare these speech components to other words we use in everyday life.* ***While a written word might have multiple definitions, we can usually determine its intended meaning through context.******In speech however, a word can take on additional layers of meaning.*** *Tone of voice, the relationship between speakers, and expectations of where a conversation will go can imbue even words that seem like filler with vital information.*

*This is where “um” and “uh” come in. Or “eh” and “ehm,” “tutoa” and “öö,” “eto” and “ano.” Linguists call these filled pauses, which are a kind of hesitation phenomenon.* ***And these seemingly insignificant interruptions are actually quite meaningful in spoken communication.*** *For example, while a silent pause might be interpreted as a sign for others to start speaking, a filled pause can signal that you’re not finished yet. Hesitation phenomena can buy time for your speech to catch up with your thoughts, or to fish out the right word for a situation.* ***And they don’t just benefit the speaker— a filled pause lets your listeners know an important word is on the way.*** *Linguists have even found that people are more likely to remember a word if it comes after a hesitation.*

***Hesitation phenomena aren’t the only parts of speech that take on new meaning during dialogue. Words and phrases such as “like,” “well” or “you know” function as discourse markers, ignoring their literal meaning to convey something about the sentence in which they appear.*** *Discourse markers direct the flow of conversation, and some studies suggest that conscientious speakers use more of these phrases to ensure everyone is being heard and understood. For example, starting a sentence with “Look...” can indicate your attitude and help you gauge the listener’s agreement. “I mean” can signal that you’re about to elaborate on something. And the dreaded “like” can perform many functions, such as establishing a loose connection between thoughts, or introducing someone else's words or actions.* ***These markers give people a real-time view into your thought process and help listeners follow, interpret, and predict what you’re trying to say.***

*Discourse markers and hesitation phenomena aren’t just useful for understanding language— they help us learn it too. In 2011, a study showed toddlers common and uncommon objects alongside a recording referring to one of the items. When a later recording asked them to identify the uncommon object, toddlers performed better if that instruction contained a filled pause. This may mean that filled pauses cue toddlers to expect novel words and help them connect new words to new objects****. For adolescents and adults learning a second language, filled pauses smooth out awkward early conversations.*** *And once they’re more confident, the second-language learner can signal their newfound fluency by using the appropriate hesitation phenomenon. Because, contrary to popular belief, the use of filled pauses doesn't decrease with mastery of a language.*

***Just because hesitation phenomena and discourse markers are a natural part of communication doesn’t mean they’re always appropriate.*** *Outside of writing dialogue, they serve no purpose in most formal writing. And in some contexts, the stigma these social cues carry can work against the speaker. But in most conversations,* ***these seemingly senseless sounds can convey a world of meaning.***

**5. Vocabulary** (15 min)

**5.1. Synonym Challenge (Say it another way)**

**Direction:** What would be a suitable synonym for the underlined words/phrases? Change the item(s) after your teacher reads each sentence.

1. *Some of the most frequent targets of this communication regulation are the “ums”, “ers”, and “likes” that pepper our conversations.*
2. *Modern schools have tried to ban the offending terms,*
3. *Renowned linguist Noam Chomsky dismissed these expressions as “errors” irrelevant to language.*
4. *None of this controversy has made these so-called disfluencies less common.*
5. *They continue to occur roughly 2 to 3 times per minute in natural speech.*
6. *Are “ums” and “uhs” just a habit we can’t break? Or is there more to them than meets the ear?*
7. *While a written word might have multiple definitions, we can usually determine its intended meaning through context.*
8. *In speech, however, a word can take on additional layers of meaning.*
9. *Tone of voice, the relationship between speakers, and expectations of where a conversation will go can imbue even words that seem like filler with vital information.*
10. *Linguists call these filled pauses, which are a kind of hesitation phenomenon.*
11. *These seemingly insignificant interruptions are actually quite meaningful in spoken communication.*
12. *Hesitation phenomena can buy time for your speech to catch up with your thoughts.*
13. *And they don’t just benefit the speaker.*
14. *Words and phrases such as “like,” “well” or “you know” function as discourse markers, ignoring their literal meaning to convey something about the sentence in which they appear.*
15. *Some studies suggest that conscientious speakers use more of these phrases to ensure everyone is being heard and understood.*
16. *Starting a sentence with “Look...” can indicate your attitude and help you gauge the listener’s agreement.*
17. *And the dreaded “like” can perform many functions*
18. *Discourse markers and hesitation phenomena aren’t just useful for understanding language*
19. *Filled pauses cue toddlers to expect novel words*
20. *For adolescents and adults learning a second language, filled pauses smooth out awkward early conversations.*
21. *The use of filled pauses doesn't decrease with mastery of a language.*

**5.2. Word Families**

**Directions:** Fill in the blanks in the re-expression of the original sentences with words of the same linguistic family. Which part of speech are both the original and resulting word? The first example has been done for you.

1. *For as long as we’ve had language, some people have tried to* ***control*** *it.* (**verb**)

**Re-expression:** For as long as we’ve had language, some people have tried to have **control** of it. (**noun**)

1. *Ancient Greek and Latin texts* ***warned*** *against speaking with hesitation.*

**Re-expression:** *Ancient Greek and Latin texts gave* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*** *against speaking with hesitation.*

1. ***Renowned*** *linguist Noam Chomsky dismissed these expressions as “errors”* ***irrelevant*** *to language.*
2. **Re-expression:** *Noam Chomsky, linguist of great* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,*** *dismissed these expressions as “errors” with no \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to language.*
3. *None of this* ***controversy*** *has made these so-called disfluencies less common.*

**Re-expression:** *None of these* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*** *phenomena**has made these so-called disfluencies less common.*

1. *To answer this question, it helps to* ***compare*** *these speech components to other words we use in everyday life.*

**Re-expression:** *To answer this question, it helps to make a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ between these speech components and other words we use in everyday life.*

1. *These seemingly insignificant* ***interruptions*** *are quite meaningful in spoken communication****.***

**Re-expression:** *These seemingly insignificant w****ords that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*** *the speech**are quite meaningful in spoken communication****.***

1. *Linguists have found that people are more likely to remember a word if it comes after a* ***hesitation****.*
2. **Re-expression:** *Linguists have found that people are more likely to remember a word that comes after the speaker* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.***
3. *These markers help listeners* ***interpret*** *and* ***predict*** *what you’re trying to say.*
4. **Re-expression:** *These markers help listeners with the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of**what you’re trying to say.*
5. *Once they’re more confident, the second-language learner can signal their newfound* ***fluency****.*

**Re-expression:** *Once they’re more confident, the second-language learner can signal he/she is now \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

1. *The use of filled pauses doesn't* ***decrease*** *with* ***mastery*** *of a language.*

**Re-expression:** *The use of filled pauses does not show a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when students* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a language.***

**6. Speaking: Monologue Presentation (10 min)**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions in the form of a brief monologue.

a) Do you use language fillers in your speech? I so, do you use them in English and/or Spanish?

****b) Do you think language fillers are a signal of vocabulary shortage?

c) Do you consider this language hesitation phenomena makes your speech look silly?

d) Did you use to fill the gaps in your first English conversations with words like “ums”, “ers” and “likes” when you were at lower levels? If so, do you believe they played some sort of role in your learning process?

e) Do you think that if a person uses too many fillers or pet words in his/her speech then he/she needs speech therapy or treatment?

f) Do you fill comfortable when talking with someone who uses pet words or phrases excessively? Has it ever happened to you? Tell us about it!