

A Psycholinguistic Investigation of Hesitation Strategies in Miller's Death of a Salesman

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Abstract

The current study examines hesitation strategies from a psychological point of view. It is conducted on Miller's Death of a salesman. The play was analysed in order to find the number of hesitation strategies used by each character and the number of each type of hesitation strategies in the play. The results of the study proved that the hesitation strategy of repetition is the most frequently used one and the character of Willy, who shows obvious signs of an unstable psychological state, is the most hesitant character.

Keywords: Hesitation, Hesitant speaker.

1. Introduction

Verbal hesitation in speech production is often treated as an outcome, with rare attempts to investigate the reasons behind it. This study investigates the strategies of hesitation and their psychological factors and the frequency of their appearance in strategies in Miller's Death of a Salesman. The questions of questions what are the most frequently used hesitation strategies in Miller's Death of a Salesman and Williams? And what is the most frequently used type of hesitation strategies are addressed in this study. It is hypothesized that psychological issues are related to the frequent use of hesitation strategies in speech .

2. Literary Review of Hesitation

2.1 Types of hesitation strategies

Types of hesitation strategies can be classified according to different scholars:

2.1.1 Stenstorm's classification

Stenstorm (2011) is one of the modern studies that classifies hesitation strategies. He suggests that hesitation strategies are; verbal fillers, lengthenings, repetitions, repairs, and formulations and restarts.

Verbal fillers such as 'you know...' and 'well...' are multifunctional pragmatically, interactionally, and in discourse. They also function as turn holders.

Lengthenings commonly used to provide the speaker with enough time to plan his next utterance. They include lengthening a word by repeating a certain letter.

Repetitions normally occur in initial positions. They are commonly used to provide the speaker with time for speech planning.

Repairs are used by the speaker to correct for the listener what he heard. They are referred to as false starts.

Reformulations and Restarts tend to occur in topic shift positions or in initial positions. In this case, the speaker uses them to reformulate what he wants to say.

2.1.2 Maclay and Osgood's classification

Maclay and Osgood (1959) classified hesitation strategies to: unfilled pauses, filled pauses, repeats, and false starts.

Unfilled pauses are also referred to silent pauses they are breaks that occur within speech and they mark word boundaries.

Filled pauses usually referred to a filler they are pauses occupied by [er, um, uh, ah] they occur in situations of semantic choice. Certain studies aimed to find the function of filled pauses (e.g., Schmid & Fägersten, 2010).

They found out that filled pauses have an emphatic function and it was found that they have a positive impact on processing. Repetitions according to Maclay & Osgood are not part of the accepted form of the sentence. Repeats can be on the levels of phoneme to words. False starts are incomplete utterances which the speaker interrupts to repair.

2.1.3 Mahl's classification

Mahl (1956) had his own types of hesitation strategies. Though not different from Maclay and Osgood's, yet very detailed. His attempt was to explore types of hesitation strategies from a psychological perspective. His categories are; ah, sentence correction, sentence completion, repetition, stutter, introducing incoherent sound, tongue slip, and omission.

2.2 Producing Hesitation Strategies

An important aspect of investigating hesitation strategies is examining and understanding how they are produced and on which positions. Barr (2001) indicated that hesitation strategies often occur at the beginning of sentences and when greater planning is needed. This led to the conclusion that hesitation strategies precede utterances with more cognitive load, i.e., more linguistic complexity (Shriberg, 1999).

The factor of familiarity is highly influential in the frequency of using hesitation strategies. Hesitation strategies occur frequently when the topic is less familiar to the speaker and vice versa (Merlo & Mansur, 2004).

hesitation strategies can be examined on a word-by-word basis. They were found to have a tendency to precede content words (Osgood & Maclay, 1956). Hesitation strategies possess some distributional properties (Beattie & Butterworth, 1997) found that both contextually improbable words and low frequency content words are possibly produced after hesitation strategies. Accordingly, they attributed the occurrence of hesitation strategies for factors of choice and not cognitive load. Speaker might choose to use less commonly used words and hence they are more likely to be hesitant. Another study that took into consideration choice in the occurrence of hesitation strategies was (Schachter et al, 2004). He found that find the frequency of filled pauses per minute in a collection of recorded lectures in different topics; natural science, social science and humanities differs according to the topic. The difference of topics is important to find out if it plays a part in how and how often hesitation strategies are used. The results revealed more use of hesitation strategies in humanities' lectures, and less or rare use in natural science. The explanation was that natural sciences have limited word choice compared to humanities, so, lecturers hesitated less. It must be mentioned that when lecturers themselves were interviewed they produced an approximately equal rates of hesitation strategies when they spoke about general matters. This leads to the final conclusion that topic and choice within topic effect the frequency of hesitation strategies.

Oomen & Postma (1991) mentioned that there are other factors that control the frequency and type of hesitation strategies used in spontaneous speech. They concluded that speakers tend to more repeats in faster speech rates. The explanation of that phenomenon was that a restart process is committed when the phonetic plan fails which leads to a repetition of words.

2.3 Functions of Hesitation Strategies

Speakers use hesitation markers such as fillers which are discourse markers. Fillers are used during pauses to produce filled pauses. Clark & Fox Tree (2002) indicated that fillers have a communicative function and so do filled pause. Though filled pauses do not convey a direct meaning, yet they are quite meaningful because they refer to a certain phenomenon and have a

certain explanation. They make communication easier because they facilitate understanding speech. Silent pause function as indicators for mental state and thinking, and they assess the speaker in holding turn.

Some of the most important and common functions of pauses in spontaneous speech are; expressing emphasis, taking a breath, interrupting the speaker, showing anxiety, and pausing due to syntactic complexity to avoid errors. Pauses refer to an important point in discourse because that is where they usually occur. They are also of a great importance for the speaker to plan his next utterance. (Brennan & Williams, 1995).

The most obvious and important function of hesitation strategies is showing hesitation which might be caused due to a psychological state. Pauses are not always used as hesitation strategies. They are the most obvious boundary markers of words, phrase, clauses, and sentences. Due to the complexity and physical efforts put in the process of speech production, it cannot be continuous, breaks must exist. And that is where pauses function effectively. So, pauses perform a physiological function. One of the most important functions of hesitation strategies is to facilitate understanding. They help in providing the listener with enough time to process the message. Other than that, they give the listener a clue about the speaker's state. (Corley & Hartsuiker, 2014)

Clark & Fox Tree (2002) argue that fillers represent the "phonology, prosody, syntax, and pragmatics of English words" and hence, they should be considered as interjections. They state that *um* and *uh* function differently. The first difference is concerned with the factor of difficulty. *Um* is used when the speaker faces more difficulty. The long pauses that follow *um* support this claim.

The difference between 'um' and 'uh' is of a special importance for the listener and speech understanding. Considering hesitation strategies as words means that the same utterance will have a different meaning whenever produced without them. Brennan & Schober (2001) claim that this view is extremist compared to the previous studies that counted hesitation strategies as mere noise.

2.4 Characteristics of Hesitant Speakers

Avoidant personalities are often characterized by a pervasive manner of social interaction and a feeling of inadequacy such personalities care about being judged by the other. They are usually very sensitive towards the expectations of others. They do not want to be rejected. So, they develop a shy character and might even develop what is known as avoidant personality disorder which affects their entire behaviour. They lessen their social interaction and overtime they might live in isolation, of this social doubtful environment due to their extreme fear of rejection and emotional harm. Their low self-esteem will lead to stress and anxiety in social situations. Even the most familiar situations with friends and family can turn into a stressful situation for an avoidant personality. An avoidant personality tends to adapt with a certain life style that is characterized by stable routine which in their perspectives provides them with a social risk-free life. It is not necessarily uninterested in building relations, but the ongoing withdraw from social life will finally lead to a full convention they are improper for such relations. Usually, shy personalities show their features from childhood. The reasons behind developing such personalities are not always clear. Other than some personality disorders the cause might be a childhood trauma due to rejection by one or both parents. Other factors, genetic or social might increase the possibility of the appearance of such an issue. Many people diagnosed with personality disorder that are characterized by shyness or avoidant behaviour were found to have suffered unfortunate experiences of rejection or bullying. It was found that some cases of shy attitude and avoidant personalities were developed due to parental control (Craig & Tran, 2006).

Johnson et al (1999) Lists eight features of an avoidant personality; comfort with habit and repetition, prefer the known to the unknown, tendency to have the house as reference, caring for others judgments, rare social interaction, preserved behaviour, attention directed to hobbies and pastime, adopting a counterphobic behaviour.

In a nutshell, the intense desire to be accepted and approved on will finally result into an excessive need of protection against any

emotional damage. Studies concerning types of personality disorder in which the patients show avoidant behaviour have emerged in recent years. These studies concentrated more on experimental aspects .e.g. (Sperry,2004)

According to (Perrotta, 2021) avoidant or shy personality a speech disfluency marker such as pause and false starts, which include stammers and repetitions. In some cases, hesitation strategies lead to anxiety in other cases it is vice versa.

Bietchman et al (2001) shows that hesitation markers such as false starts increased in anxiety provoking situations, for instance, speaking in public.

Further evidence that supports the effect of anxiety on speech production and hesitation strategies is that patients who seek treatment are often provided with anti-anxiety treatment programs. (De Carle & Pato, 1996)

2.5 Psychological Causes of Hesitation in Speech

Hesitation strategies occur in daily interaction and they are common in language production which makes them of concern for psycholinguistic, so, to understand them fully they must be examined from a psychological view. The following paragraphs are concerned with some of the most frequent psychological disorders that reflect on over use of hesitation strategies as a symptom. Alzheimer disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative disorder featured by a gradual progressive cognitive and functional deficit as well as behavioural changes and is associated with accumulation of amyloid and dispositions in the brain (Apostolova, 2016).

Sperling (2011) mentions the following symptoms of AD, which include deficit in short term memory, a dysfunction in executive tasks and a visuo-spatial disability. The most common feature of Alzheimer patients is memory impairment, never the less, the patients might develop other disorders that coincide with AD, such as aphasia, apathy, and personality change. The most common neuropsychiatric symptom is anxiety, which is often triggered when the patients find themselves in stressing situations. That will lead to depression. Other symptoms which might occur in the late stages of AD are

hallucinations, delusions, loss of appetite and sleeping problems (Plassman et al, 2008).

Difficulties in the semantic impairment includes a struggle in finding words and their comprehension, or even mis choosing words, incoherent speech and fluency problems. The patients of AD also suffer from language impairment due to pragmatic aspects. Pragmatic competence depends highly on social knowledge. AD patients have pragmatic issues such as using the wrong tone. some of the pragmatic issues intersects with other symptoms such as memory loss. It is argued that the problems on both sides, the pragmatic and the semantic correlate to produce language impairment. The problem of finding a suitable word will expand into a problem of incoherent speech. Strategies of hesitation such as pauses often occur in the speech of AD patients due to memory issues. False starts represented in choosing incorrect words result in pragmatic impairment. The patient's inability to express himself due to language decline will have severe impacts on his life. The patient might feel inadequate and unable to connect socially, which will finally lead to emotional distress and depression as provided by studies like (Galasko et al,2005; Feldman, 2005).

Schizophrenia is another disorder in which the patient's speech is rich with hesitation strategies. There are no certain causes for schizophrenia, but the common view is that there are biological and environmental causes for this disorder to be developed. The biological causes for schizophrenia include genetics and imbalance of the chemicals of the brain. The disorder may be developed due to brain problems that demerge during childhood and early teen years. It is also argued that the structure of schizo patients is different from normal people, but it has not been discovered yet whether this difference is a cause of schizophrenia or not (Ernest et al, 2017).

The symptoms of this disorder overlap with symptoms of other disorders. So far there is not a scan or a test to diagnose it. However, psychiatrists and psychologists manage to diagnose it based on the symptoms which occur on three phases. The first phase might last for years. During this phase the patient suffers a change in behaviour and attitude, a loss of interest in social life and apathy. It is followed by the active phase when the patient suffers

from hallucinations, delusions and other symptoms such as a loss of awareness and disturbance of feeling. In the second phase symptoms may occur very rapidly, and that is why preventing the phase repetition is crucial for treatment. The cognitive symptoms of schizophrenia are dangerous due to their long-lasting effects. They are represented by; attention and memory issues, processing and reasonable judgement problems, and loss of sense of social concentrations (Leamy et al, 2011)

Parkinson disease PD is defined as “a progressive neurological disorder characterized by large number of motor and non-motor features that can impact on function to a variable degree” (Jankovic, 2008, p.38).

The disease was first described in 1817 by James Parkinson. The causes of PD are unknown, but there are some factors that were found to have a bond with it. One of these factors is a genetic mutation, though this is a rare case, it is still a risky element especially if a close family member had PD. Aging is not a cause for PD, yet it is a risky element two. (Post et al, 2007).

The most prominent symptom in PD is tremor which starts usually in the limbs and particularly hands. PD may cause a slowing of the patient's movement which makes the simplest daily tasks quite difficult. The muscles will suffer stiffness which participates in the lack of motor control that does not only affect motion, but also speech production. More hesitant speech will result. (Ebersbach et al , 2006)

Dysarthria is a prominent feature of PD. It is caused by a neurological deficit, in which the patient shows speech production issues. (Logemann et al, 1978). Some of the symptoms dysarthria result in imprecise articulation. Kleinow et al (2001) found that PD patients have a problem in coordinating articulators to produce correct utterances, this is due to their lack of motor control. It is found that the linguistic complexity plays a major role in the difficulty of speech production for speakers in general and PD patients in particular. syntactic errors were found to be increasing in more complex and longer units. (Lieberman et al, 1992).

Repeats often occur as a speech deficit for PD patients due to the motor control issues. The psychological burden caused by the disease will lead to more hesitant speech represented by more pauses and less speech production in general. (Critchly, 1981).

Aphasia is a neurological disorder “any disturbance in comprehension or expression of language caused by brain lesion” (Schoeman & Louw, 2003). In order to have a better understanding about aphasia one must have some basic knowledge about the brain anatomy and language areas. There are two hemispheres and language functions are located in the left one for 90% of individuals (Basso, 1992).

Broca's area, which was first referred to by Broca in 1861, controls the articulatory system (production of language). While Wernicke's area, which was first referred to by Wernicke in 1874, controls language comprehension and processing. (Berndt & Caramazza, 1980)

The types of aphasia are referred to according to the most prominent symptoms and the area which might control the existence of such symptoms (Brust et al, 1976). There are two basic types of aphasia: fluent and non-fluent. Fluent aphasia which was devised by Broca is characterized by a disorder in the reception of language with problems in auditory competition and repetition. The patient is able to utter fluent speech, yet full of incorrect and nonsensical sentences. This is referred to as paraphasia (Folstein & Lurai, 1973).

Non fluent aphasia was devised by Wernicke. It is characterized by non-fluent speech the speaker suffers and has to put great effort to produce utterances, never the less he maintains valid comprehension (Hesketh, 1999).

Apraxia is a disorder that almost always co exists with aphasia the main characteristics of acquired apraxia of speech (AOS) are abnormal frequency of pauses, slow speech, frequent use of stress, incorrect sound combinations, additions, omissions and incorrect substitutions. (Haley et al, 2017).

The previous were examples of the disorders that might cause the occurrence of hesitation strategies in speech. The psychological state of the common speaker who does not have any disorders also affects speech and cause hesitant

speech production as indicated by (Beitchman,2001).

Stammering which is a form of false starts is one of the most well-known speech disturbances that are caused by anxiety and trauma in an early age. Some of the most common symptoms of a stammering person are; emotional struggle, shyness, social avoidance and high levels of anxiety. This proves that common people may produce hesitation strategies due to psychological state without having any disorders (Craig & Tran,2012).

3. Methodology

This study is based on two models;(Maclay & Osgood,1959) and (Mahl,1956).According to (Maclay&Osgood,1959) there are four types of hesitation strategies; unfilled pauses, filled pauses, repeats, and false starts. This model as conducted in 1959. It depended on a quantitative and a qualitative approach.

The second model (Mahl,1956) hesitation strategies are made of the following types; ah, sentence correlation (SC), sentence incompletion (SI), repetition of words (R), stutter(S), introducing incoherent sound (IIS), tongue slip(TS), and omission of words(OW).

The study is conducted by combining the strategies of both types to come up with the following types of hesitation strategies (H.S): unfilled pauses (UP), filled pauses (FP), repetition(R), false starts (FS) and incomplete sentences (SI). The analysis was conducted on Miller's Death of a salesman.

4. Results and Discussion

Table (1) The number and percentage of hesitation strategies in Miller's "Death of a Salesman"

H. S	Sum	%
UP	18	22.784
FP	4	5.063
R	27	34.177
FS	7	8.860
IS	23	29.113
Total	79	

Table (1) shows the total number of hesitation strategies in the entire play and the number of

each type of hesitation strategies in the play. The most frequently used hesitation strategy is repetition and the least used one is filled pause (FP) with only four cases in the play out of seventy-three cases of hesitation, which proves the first hypothesis that the least used type of hesitation strategies is filled pause.

Table (2): Hesitation Strategy per Character in Miller's Death of a Salesman

Character	Sum	%
Willy	47	59.493
Linda	7	8.860
Biff	17	21.518
Happy	3	3.797
Bernard	1	1.265
Charley	1	1.265
Stanley	3	3.797

Table (2) shows the number and percentage of using hesitation strategies by each character mentioned in the analysed texts. The most hesitant character is Willy, the old man with suicidal tendencies and a depression while the least hesitant characters are Charley and Bernard, two successful men with no past regrets and who do not show any signs of psychological issues. This proves the third hypothesis that psychological issues Cause some speakers to be more hesitant than others.

5. Conclusions

The following points are concluded from the current study

- The most frequently used type of hesitation strategies is repetition (R).
- The most hesitant character in the play is Willy due to the results that show him as the character that used hesitation strategies the most.
- Characters' use of hesitation strategies increases with the possibility of having a psychological issue.

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