

Hesitation Lengthening: Buying Dialogue Time For Free

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„You should avoid saying *uh* and *uhm* a lot, it sounds unprofessional.“ This is probably the most common notion with regard to hesitations and disfluencies, which are terms encompassing speech phenomena like *uh* and *uhm*. There is more to hesitations, though: Hesitations are all phenomena that extend the speech signal temporarily, thus allowing extra time for speaker and listener. Aside from fillers, as *uh* and *uhm* are commonly called, the most common hesitation phenomena are silences and lengthenings of speech sounds. Research since the 1990s at the latest has begun to view hesitations as something useful in communication, but the topic is still under-researched. Fillers, as the most renowned element of hesitation, have received the greatest deal of attention, to the extent that fillers seem to be used as *pars pro toto* when talking about hesitations and disfluencies. I will devote this talk to lengthening, which has proven to be a very useful tool in communication, but behaves quite differently from fillers, highlighting the need for a more differentiated view. Using lengthening, it is possible to control notions of uncertainty and buy dialogue time for free, that is, without the listener noticing. Astonishingly, this works in human-human as well as in human-machine communication. In this talk, I will discuss the what distinguishes lengthening from other hesitations and what other undiscovered potential might lie within.