


Enhancing Professional Fluency: Leveraging Discourse Markers and Fluencemes in Vocational English Presentations

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A B S T R A C T

Oral fluency is a vital competency for Business Administration students in global settings. However, the synergy between discourse markers (DMs) and fluencemes in vocational assessments remains under-researched. This qualitative study explicitly addresses: (1) what types of DMs and fluencemes appear in students' presentations; (2) what functional purposes these markers serve; and (3) how they influence message clarity and coherence. Analyzing nine speech transcripts from Semarang State Polytechnic via Crible's (2018) DisFrEn framework, findings reveal that DMs and fluencemes act as strategic cognitive resources rather than mere errors. Students employ tactics like "Structural Anchoring" to maintain coherence under high cognitive load. Most participants fall into the "Effortful but Communicative" category. Consequently, vocational curricula should prioritize oral discourse management strategies over native-like accuracy to foster professional pragmatic competence in workplace communication

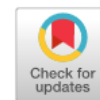
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INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency covers a wide range of fields of study, especially when it comes to fluency in a foreign language (L2). This remains a complex and interesting topic of academic discussion. Assessing foreign language fluency is not easy, as there is no single definition that can describe it specifically. In order to communicate fluently in English, speakers are often required to design and deliver messages quickly, a skill observed by researchers such as Rehbein & Greiner, (1988). Segalowitz (2010) also states that some aspects of L2 performance always demonstrate a person's ability to use basic processes effectively to plan and construct utterances, ultimately resulting in appropriate spontaneous conversation. The quality of presentation delivery can be disrupted by indications of disfluency such as fillers (e.g., um, eh), interruptions, repetitions, and corrections (Aslan & Eggers, 2025; Buana & Ananda, 2022; Cui, 2025; Gambhir & Tangkiengsirisin, 2023). Although these signs sometimes indicate indecision or doubt, it is important to remember that they play a major role in regulating the flow of conversation and facilitating the thinking process. Fluency is often defined as an impression of spontaneity and ease of understanding, or more precisely, how easily a conversation is digested by both the speaker and the listener. (Hermawan, 2022; Hubková, 2025; Irawan et al., 2022; Koponen, M., & Riggenbach, H. (2000); Kosmala & Morgenstern, 2019; Zulhemindra et al., 2022) have also identified four aspects of fluency in speaking, namely: (1) the ability to speak at length without too many pauses; (2) the ability to construct sentences that are logical, coherent, and rich in meaning; in simple terms, people who speak fluently do not usually fill conversations with empty words; (3) the ability to convey something

appropriate in various situations; and (4) the ability to be creative and imaginative in language, expressing ideas in new ways, playing with words, being humorous, paying attention to sound without being fixated on meaning, and changing speaking styles.

Within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a long-standing debate persists regarding the relative importance of fluency and accuracy. Conventional EAP literature typically stresses the importance of precise grammar and vocabulary use as the primary indicator of academic achievement. In contrast to this, modern ESP research claims that in professional or technical settings, fluency in communication is frequently more crucial. The central issue in this debate is whether students of vocational studies should aim for precision (accuracy) or effective communication (fluency). In polytechnic settings, where students require greater effort to study, the employment of DMs and fluencemes is essential for achieving this equilibrium. Students with limited English proficiency experience significant difficulties when giving presentations. They may make grammatical errors, pause to think, or communicate unclearly (Alghorbany & Hamzah, 2020); Yasmin, 2022).

Research shows that students with low language skills continue to struggle with problems such as anxiety, limited vocabulary, and difficulty organizing their thoughts coherently. In a polytechnic environment, these challenges are even greater due to the gap between communication needs and common teaching methods. Studies on oral communication have long recognized that discourse markers are important linguistic tools that help achieve coherence, organize ideas, and signal transitions (Abdullah & Mohammed, 2023; Ali, 2023; Aslan & Eggers, 2025; Bell, 2010). Discourse markers such as “well,” “y’know,” “oh,” “I mean,” “so,” “yeah,” and “like” function in various aspects, including cognitive, communicative, social, and textual. Fraser (1990) argues that discourse markers are practical cues that comment on the relationship between a utterance and the preceding discourse, thereby guiding listeners in interpreting it. Research from various countries (Khandaghi Khameneh & Fakhraee Faruji, 2020; Johnson, 2015) proves that specific training on discourse markers can improve clarity and persuasiveness. Schiffrin (1987) also asserts that analyzing discourse markers requires us to understand how speakers and listeners align form, meaning, and action to produce a shared understanding of verbal interaction. Previous studies have tended to examine fluency in everyday conversation, academic settings, or examinations (Ginther et al., 2010; Yan et al., 2025). Additionally, some studies have also examined the use of fillers, silences, and repetitions in casual conversations (Adawiyah & Istiqomah, 2025; Baligat et al., 2022; Beliao & Lacheret, 2013) or investigated speech disorders in educational settings (Astuti et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2023; Carney, 2022; Hilton, 2008). Research on discourse markers has mostly focused on classroom or formal settings (Fuseini, 2024; Campillos-Llanos, 2025) and studies on Business English generally focus on vocabulary, sentence structure, and ways of influencing (Wang & Li, 2021; Blažková, 2022), but have not yet explored the impact and function of fluency markers in business presentations.

Creating a learning method that explicitly teaches the use of discourse markers will help teachers improve students' presentation skills and build their confidence when speaking in public, as stated (Xing & Bolden, 2019; Tian & Mahmud, 2018;). This study adopts the classification of Discourse Markers and Fluencemes as formulated by Ludivine Crible (2018). His research highlights how the form and role of these markers differ structurally across languages and communication styles. Crible (2018) also emphasizes that DM and DFM are not mere errors, but rather an integral part of communication tactics. This helps speakers organize their thoughts, turn-taking, and message integrity in formal situations such as presentations. What is new in this research is its focus: examining the communication tactics of Business Administration students who took General English courses at the Semarang State Polytechnic (Polines) during public service presentations. Observations of Business Administration students found that they were often torn between maintaining fluency and accuracy. For example, the Precise Monitoring tactic found in students shows great attention to accuracy through self-correction, but risks increasing awkwardness. Conversely, the use of

sequential tactics such as Structural Anchoring is an effective solution for second language speakers to maintain message integrity even though their sentence structure is not complete.

This study focuses on Business Administration students at the Semarang State Polytechnic (Polines) during public service presentations. Research indicates that these students frequently find themselves caught between achieving accuracy through self-editing and fluency through structural support. This study offers a new viewpoint on L2 workplace communication by investigating how students utilise DFM in a demanding, specialist setting. The purpose of this study is to meet the following research objectives consequently. (1) To classify and categorize the various types of discourse markers and fluencemes utilised by students in public service presentations. (2) The purposes of these markers (e.g., gap-filling, signalling uncertainty, or sequencing) require examination. (3) To investigate how these markers impact the overall clarity and coherence of messages within public service communications.

METHOD

Respondents

The participants in this study consisted of nine first-semester students from the Applied Business Administration study program at Semarang State Polytechnic (Polines). Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on the following requirements: (1) they are currently registered in General English classes; (2) they have no prior professional experience in public speaking in an English-speaking workplace; and (3) they are classified as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students. Observing first-semester vocational program students enabled the researcher to examine how basic-level second language (L2) learners handle communicative strategies under high-pressure assessment circumstances.

Presentation Task Design

The data were elicited through an individual oral presentation task. Students were required to deliver a Public Service Review, evaluating the quality and efficiency of a specific public service (e.g., banking, healthcare, or government offices). (1) Duration: Each presentation lasted between 3 to 5 minutes. (2) Context: The task served as the Final Summative Assessment for the semester, creating a high-stakes environment designed to trigger the use of both fluency markers and disfluency features as students navigated technical vocabulary and spontaneous delivery. (3) Assessment: Presentations were evaluated based on content, linguistic accuracy, and delivery, though this study focuses specifically on the markers used during the performance.

Instruments

The primary analytical tool used in this study is the DisFrEn framework developed by Ludivine Crible (2018). To ensure high-quality data, students recorded their performances using high-definition mobile devices in a carefully managed classroom environment. The transcription process underwent a multi-stage reliability verification procedure: first, preliminary verbal data were processed using YouTube's Auto-Captioning feature; second, during the manual verification stage, researchers conducted a "deep listening" phase to carefully review and correct the auto-generated transcripts; and finally, the completed transcripts incorporated detailed notations for fluencemes – such as silent pauses marked by duration, filled pauses (e.g., "um" and "eh"), repetitions, and self-corrections – thereby ensuring that all communicative cues were accurately preserved.

Procedures

The research process began by recording each student during their classroom presentations. Once the videos were recorded, the data was uploaded to YouTube so that automatic transcription could be generated, with the aim of making verbal data processing more efficient in the early stages. At the same time, the researchers also listened carefully to the video recordings to check and manually correct the automatic transcription. This method is used to ensure that all speech disfluency features, such as pauses and repetitions, are accurately recorded according to the spoken data.

Data analysis



Using Crible's (2018) functional typology of markers that classifies them into four functions: ideational, rhetorical, sequential and interpersonal the coding proceeded in a systematic way. The research took several steps to ensure the validity of its findings. 20% of the transcripts were coded independently by a second researcher with expertise in discourse analysis. 100% agreement was established, after discussing any discordances in the classification of DMs or fluencemes. A coding manual was used by the researchers in order to standardize their coding across all samples, ensuring the function of each marker (e.g., whether "so" functioned as a resultative marker or a filler) was accurately identified based on the surrounding context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research on the presentation recordings of nine Business Administration students at Semarang State Polytechnic shows an interesting relationship between the use of discourse markers and fluency in speaking. This study is based on the DisFrEn model (Crible, 2018), which groups the functions of discourse markers into four important parts: ideational, rhetorical, sequential, and interpersonal. The results show that students use these elements not only as a result of language difficulties, but also as a thinking strategy to maintain a balance between accuracy of information and the ability to speak fluently. The collaboration between discourse markers and characteristics of disfluency helps foreign language speakers to remain effective communicators in professional settings that require high concentration. The results of this functional analysis are explained in-depth discussion as follow.

Types of Discourse Markers and Fluencemes in Students' Oral Presentations

The classification in question pertains to the DisFluency and ENcoding (DisFrEn) protocol devised by Crible (2016, 2018), which treats disfluency as a fundamental aspect of spoken language production. This study identified three main types of fluencemes in the data: Filled Pauses (FP), Identical Repetition (IR), and False Starts (FS). These features most often appeared at the beginning of presentations, during topic changes, or during technical explanations.

Filled Pauses (FP): This is the most common type, usually appearing as the vowels "uh," "eh," or "mm." This phenomenon often occurs just before technical vocabulary, indicating mental strain when recalling words.

Transcript Example (Student 1): "In this place have uh A um collection place with original item..."

Transcript Example (Student 2): "...as the main example. Eh, ok let's move on to the presentation..."

Identical Repetition (IR): Students often repeat words to give themselves time to think or to emphasize a point.

Transcript Example (Student 1): "Okay, we we start with in the pavilion..."

Transcript Example (Student 8): "...the motorcycle parking area is not well organized so visitor might feel confused confused pressing their vehicle..."

Transcript Example (Student 7): "I chose I chose this topic because it is important."

False Starts (FS): Occur when the speaker cuts off a sentence midway and restarts with a new structure to maintain coherence.

Transcript Example (Student 1): "The main room was uh was cleaning A clean list."

Transcript Example (Student 9): "Next. Next. at one and two, clearly aware of the rules."

These fluencemes predominantly occur at the beginning, when switching between topics, and during technical or evaluative explanations. Filled pauses are the most common type of fluenceme, typically manifesting as vocalizations like "uh", "eh", or 'mm'. The student states in the transcript, "Nevertheless, certain equipment might be outdated and in poor condition." Filled pauses frequently occur right before technical vocabulary, indicating mental strain during word recall. In cases of Identical Repetition (IR), students frequently repeat one or more words to provide themselves with time to think or to add emphasis. Student number

7 repeats the phrase: "...I chose I chose this topic...". Crible characterizes this as a precise monitoring strategy, where the speaker verifies the accuracy of each unit of information before proceeding. The next phenomenon is the false start, which takes place when a speaker interrupts themselves mid-sentence and begins again with a different sentence structure. Student 9 demonstrates this pattern when transitioning between points: "Next. Next. at one and two, clearly aware of the rules". False starts are part of a dynamic self-repair process that helps maintain the overall coherence of a message. The use of discourse markers, especially "okay," "so," and "let's move on," was also identified, in addition to fluencemes. These markers were consistently employed to control the presentation's pace, signal topic shifts, and guide the audience's focus. The majority of Discourse Markers from the Sequential functional domain were found in the student transcripts. Its primary function is to identify the start, conclusion, and shift between segments of data. A notable instance can be seen in Student 1, who employs ordering markers, such as "good morning, everyone" and "Firstly," to indicate turn-taking. Furthermore, Student 9 employs topic-shift markers, including "that is for point one. Next. Next. at one and two eh clear...".

Markers like "Okay," "So," and "First" serve as navigational aids that help the audience follow the organised structure of a presentation, a hallmark of professionalism in a professional environment. Following this is the rhetorical domain, which employs markers to stress, distinguish, or finalise a point. Students 2 and 4 exhibit proficient use of the contrast feature. In Student 2's transcript, staff members are found to be very helpful to students. The system has not been updated. The marker 'However' functions to alter the argument's direction from praise to critical evaluation, whereas Student 8 employs a double adversative marker: "...confused confused...". Despite extreme cognitive pressure, attempts are being made to construct and build logical reasoning, specifically through the phrase "However... but... we must improve." The Interpersonal Domain was also identified. This marker is intended to track audience participation and regulate social interactions throughout presentations. Student number 5 provided the most compelling example via the monitoring feature, which was "give the best for the customer." Do you show respect? Be our top choice. The rhetorical question aids face-saving; it assists the speaker in interacting with the audience to conceal long pauses, thereby maintaining a lively and professional flow of communication. The final one is the Ideational Domain. This domain links events meaningfully, including cause and effect or sequences in chronological order. Student number 7 employs the cause marker when discussing public service. The phrase "I chose this topic because it is important" serves as the logical foundation for the speaker's selection, thereby allowing the audience to comprehend the argument's background. The second... I chose I chose this topic because it is important. "The marker" because" here functionally provides a logical basis for the speaker's actions in choosing the evaluation topic, ensuring that the audience understands the background of the argument.

Functional Purpose of Discourse Markers and Fluencemes

From a functional perspective, discourse markers and fluencemes play a significant role in managing oral discourse in student public service presentations. The features in question serve as interactional resources that support real-time speech planning, self-monitoring, and discourse organization, as proposed by the DisFrEn protocol (Crible 2018). This section's analysis centers on the functional distribution of discourse markers and fluencemes found in the data. The distribution of functional discourse markers and fluencemes detected in the data is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Functional Distribution of Discourse Markers and Fluencemes in Student Presentations

Data	Discourse Markers Category	Main type of Fluencemes	Example(s)	Function
Student 1	Sequential / Topic Management	Repetition (RI)	"So guys, today I will", "let's get started" , "we we", "the the"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marking the beginning of a topic or main segment of the presentation Buying time to overcome lexical

				formulation barriers.
Student 2	Sequential (Structuring)	Filled Pause (FP)	"Number one", "First of all", "eh"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize content hierarchically. Signal word search or sentence planning.
Student 3	Interactional / Framing	Unfilled Pause (UP)	"guys", Long pause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building audience engagement. Failed to produce words
Student 4	Rhetorical (Contrast)	Filled Pause (uh); Modified Repetition (RM)	"However, some equipment may be worn out...", <i>next, however, facility facilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematically distinguish positive and negative points
Student 5	Interpersonal (Monitoring)	Filled Pause (eh)	"do you respect? ... be the one be the best"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use interaction to overcome lexical barriers.
Student 6	Sequential (Structuring)	Code-switching (L1); Filled Pause (FP); False Start (FS)	"First... second... third..." / "Iya. <i>next, eh, I will...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use number sequences and native language assistance.
Student 7	Sequential (Ordering)	Repetition (RI)	"The first... The second..." / "I chose I chose"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on information accuracy through self-correction.
Student 8	Rhetorical (Adversative)	Repetition (RI)	"However... but..." / "confused confused"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build critical arguments amid cognitive barriers.
Student 9	Sequential (Topic-shift)	False Start (FS)	"Next. Next." / "at one and two eh clear"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rely on the word "Next" as a transition anchor.

The data in Table 2 indicates that students primarily use discourse markers for purposes such as sequencing, transitioning between topics, and closing statements. In the meantime, the most dominant fluencemes are filled pauses, which serve as strategies for filling gaps and planning utterances. According to Crible (2018), fluencemes are cognitive resources in spoken language production, rather than just signs of disfluency. These markers do not manifest as random disruptions, but rather as linguistic adaptation mechanisms facilitating effective communication for second language (L2) speakers. Crible (2018) suggests that these functions can be classified within the sequential, rhetorical, and interpersonal domains, each contributing to students' professional fluency in distinct ways.

Influence on Clarity and Coherence

The findings of this study comprehensively show that fluencemes and discourse markers play an integral role in building clarity and coherence in public service presentation discourse. Rather than being understood as two separate linguistic phenomena, the two operate simultaneously and complement each other as interactive resources that enable students to maintain effective oral communication despite limited linguistic fluency. Referring to Crible's (2018) theoretical framework, this study reinforces the view that fluencemes are not merely indicators of speaking inability, but rather pragmatic strategies that serve to manage cognitive load, maintain continuity of interaction, and support the process of constructing discourse that is coherent and understandable to the audience. In general, fluencemes such as repetitions, filled pauses, and false starts are often associated with unpreparedness or lack of fluency in speaking. However, the findings of this study show that in the context of public service presentations by L2 students, fluencemes actually play a crucial role as a compensation mechanism. Fluencemes enable speakers to maintain the flow of communication when faced with lexical, syntactic, or conceptual difficulties. Thus, fluencemes help prevent long silences

that could potentially distract the audience and disrupt the continuity of discourse. These findings are in line with Crible's (2018) argument that fluencemes are part of the repertoire of interactional strategies that speakers actively use to maintain the continuity of oral discourse production. However, this study also confirms that the contribution of fluencemes to discourse clarity is highly dependent on their balance with the use of discourse markers.

Students who rely excessively on fluencemes without adequate discourse markers tend to produce presentations that are less structured and difficult to follow, especially in the transitions between ideas and main explanations. Conversely, students who consistently utilize discourse markers are able to construct a clearer, more logical, and coherent discourse framework. This shows that fluencemes and discourse markers cannot be understood separately, but rather as two instruments that work together in shaping discourse organization. Furthermore, the functional use of discourse markers and fluencemes has a significant impact on the internal structure and comprehensibility of students' spoken discourse. Within Crible's (2018) framework, these markers function as pragmatic instructions that help listeners integrate information into their mental model of discourse. This influence is particularly evident in L2 speakers at the "Effortful but Communicative" fluency level, where speech production is characterized by high cognitive load, but messages are still conveyed effectively thanks to the appropriate use of markers. Discourse markers and fluencemes together provide a spatial dimension to the temporality of speech, allowing the audience to recognize the boundaries of discourse segments and follow the speaker's line of argument more systematically. In terms of coherence, the Sequential and Rhetorical domains of discourse markers play a central role as "navigation tools" for the audience. Sequential markers such as *Firstly*, *Next*, and *So* help manage discourse segmentation and mark transitions between presentation points.

This strategy has proven effective in maintaining global coherence, even when speakers experience production disruptions such as false starts. Findings on Student 9, for example, show that the use of the Structural Anchoring strategy through repeated sequential markers serves as a communicative anchor that prevents damage to the overall discourse structure. Meanwhile, markers in the Rhetorical domain, such as *However*, strengthen argumentative coherence by directing the audience from the description of information to critical evaluation or the speaker's subjective attitude. In terms of clarity, fluencemes also demonstrate a strategic function that is no less important. Controlled use of fluencemes allows speakers to independently monitor the accuracy of their messages amid cognitive pressure. This is reflected in the Precise Monitoring strategy observed in Student 7, where identical repetitions are used not as a sign of doubt, but as an effort to ensure that the information conveyed is accurate and does not cause ambiguity. In addition, filler pauses that appear before technical terms or complex concepts provide additional planning time, so that speech output becomes clearer and more focused. In this context, fluencemes serve as a solution to speech production challenges, not as a cause of communication failure.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that discourse markers and fluencemes are two linguistic resources that work synergistically in the oral presentations of Business Administration students who use a second language (L2). The findings show that speech disfluencies cannot be understood solely as linguistic weaknesses or cognitive barriers, but rather as pragmatic strategies that students actively use to maintain the flow of communication, keep their turn-taking, and build discourse coherence under high cognitive load. This is in line with the discussion in Chapter Discussion, which emphasizes that fluencemes in the L2 context function as a compensatory mechanism, not as an indicator of communication failure. Referring to Crible's (2018) framework, students in this study showed a strong tendency to utilize navigational strategies, particularly through the Sequential domain. The use of sequential markers helps students manage transitions between topics in a more structured and secure manner, so that the overall discourse organization is maintained even though speech production is accompanied by

fillers, repetitions, and self-corrections. This strategy functions as a structural anchor that prevents damage to coherence when the speaker experiences articulation difficulties, as discussed in the analysis of findings. The Rhetorical domain also plays a crucial role in constructing argumentative coherence. Students use contrastive and evaluative markers to lead the audience in distinguishing between descriptive details and the speaker's point of view. The strategy enhances the argument's clarity, despite students' language skills being currently restricted. Markers in the Interpersonal domain help to keep the audience engaged and also serve as a face-saving mechanism when students struggle with vocabulary. The use of greetings or rhetorical questions enables uninterrupted communication to proceed. Based on the Crible fluency scale, most students fall into the "Effortful but Communicative" category. Although their presentations were marked by a relatively high level of disfluency, the main message was still conveyed effectively through the strategic use of discourse markers. The results of this study provide an important contribution to the design of English language curricula in vocational education (polytechnics). To improve students' work readiness, curriculum design needs to shift its focus from mere grammatical accuracy to the Oral Discourse Management Model. Strategic recommendations include: (1) Integration of Pragmatic Competence: Curriculum development must include explicit training on the use of discourse markers as discourse navigation so that students can manage transitions of ideas professionally in the work environment. (2) Redefinition of Assessment Rubrics: Speaking ability assessments should begin to appreciate the use of fluencemes as legitimate communication tactics, emphasizing message integrity and global coherence rather than merely the absence of linguistic errors. (3) High-Stakes Task Design: Integrate simulations of high-concentration public service communication to accustom students to managing cognitive load using the pragmatic compensation strategies identified in this study.

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