

# Before the rise of *um*

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## 1 Introduction

One of the most dramatic discourse-pragmatic changes in twentieth-century English has progressed under the radar of laypeople and (until recently) linguists: the rise of *um* as the predominant variant of the ‘filled pause’ variable (UHM) at the expense of *uh* (Fruehwald, 2016; Tottie, 2011; Wieling et al., 2016). Fruehwald (2016: 43) documents this “textbook” change over 100+ years of apparent time: *um* increases incrementally between generations and the rise is led by women. In this chapter, we investigate (UHM) at an early stage of change to determine what triggered the rise of *um*.

## 2 Change in progress

The rise of *um* has now been described extensively in the variationist and corpus-linguistic literature, across a number of corpora and speech communities.

In the British National Corpus, Tottie (2011) observed that *um* was used more frequently than *uh* by women, younger speakers, and more educated speakers; men, older speakers and educated speakers used (UHM) more often overall. Fruehwald (2016)