Chapter 1

Fillers in the world's languages: a refined typology

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Abstract

"There are marginal phenomena that give a basis for very important lessons about the nature of language in general, about particular languages, and about the way we need to approach the examination and analysis of languages." (Joseph 1997: 200)

1 Introduction

This volume focuses on one such marginal phenomenon that is starting to garner more and more attention, namely fillers. These are markers of hesitation and substitutes for items that elude a speaker or that she does not want to utter; as such, they belong to the many vague expressions found in natural languages (Cutting 2007). The term 'filler' is used in different ways in the literature: it was introduced by Clark & Fox Clark & Fox Tree (2002: 75) with reference to English *uh* and *uhm*, which had until then been mostly designated as 'filled pauses' (a label that continues to be used for items like *uh* and *uhm*, cf. Lickley 2015: 458, Kosmala & Crible 2022, Kirjavainen, **CribleBeeching2022**, in addition to 'filler'). Sometimes, however, the term 'filler' is used much more broadly as a label "… for all of the non-silence devices that can be deployed after the current word has been brought to completion to delay the next word due" (Fox 2010: 2), i.e. it includes final vowel lengthening or discourse particles. In contrast, in this volume we focus on **conventionalized fillers**, and in particular on two subtypes that

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roughly coincide with what Bloomfield (1933: 186, cited from **MaclayOsgood1959**: 21) called "special parenthetic hesitation forms": hesitatives (also called hesitators or interjective hesitators) and placeholders. *Ad hoc* delaying devices, such as silent pauses, final syllable lengthening, or false starts and repetitions, as well as discourse particles that have a wide range of functions, are thus excluded from consideration (other than in comparison with conventionalized fillers). We define fillers as follows:

(1) A FILLER is an overt and independent marker of hesitation with a conventionalized form which is used in disfluency and which often has other discourse functions. Two strategies of use can be distinguished, namely HESITATORS (or HESITATIVES), elements that are non-referential and not morphosyntactically integrated into the unfolding utterance, and PLACEHOLDERS, which substitute for a particular element of the utterance and hence are morphosyntactically integrated and referential.

For instance, French eum is a hesitative: it is not referential and not morphosyntactically integrated (**??**). In contrast, Dalabon keninjhbi is a placeholder, since it is referential and integrated within a noun phrase (2).

(2) French (Kosmala & Crible 2022:7)
une anecdote t'en as pas une ? ***eum*** *(1.120) ah, c'est*
an anecdote 2SG PART.O have[PRS.2SG] NEG one ***uhm*** ah, that.is
bon !
good
'an anecdote don't you have one ? **uhm** (1.120) ah I have one!'[1]

(3) Dalabon (Ponsonnet, to appear:306, ex.(9))
Kanidjah bala-lng-bo-ninj ***keninjhbi-ngong*** *[3.76s]*
DEM 3pl-SEQ-go-PIMP PH-group kangaroo-group
kunj-ngong bala-h-bo-ninj ***keninjhbi*** *djakana …*
3pl-R-go-PIMP PH bird.species
„They were going there, **all the whatsit**… [pause] all the kangaroos were going there, the **whatsit** jacanas."

Such fillers were at the margins of linguistic research for a considerable time, with notable exceptions being the seminal paper by Hayashi & Yoon (2006) and

[1] In the examples, fillers are highlighted in bold, while their targets, where relevant, are underlined.

the edited volume by **AmiridzeEtAl2010**. Recently, however, interest has exploded, with a spate of papers exploring fillers in different languages appearing in the last few years (e.g. Seraku 2020, Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022, Klyachko 2022, Nagaya 2022, Vallejos-Yopán 2023). Seraku, in particular, has explored the pragmatics of placeholders in the light of different semantic and formal approaches (**Seraku2022a**, b, 2023, 2024). However, the preliminary typology proposed by Podlesskaya (2010) still remains the main cross-linguistic overview of morphosyntactic aspects of fillers (more precisely, of placeholders), and we believe the time has come to bring our knowledge on all aspects of fillers up to date. Hence we aim to provide a review of both functional and morphosyntactic aspects of fillers in a cross-linguistic perspective, basing ourselves on published literature as well as on the new insights that emerge from the chapters included in this volume.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section **??** provides an overview of what is known about the cross-linguistic distribution of fillers, and Section **??** discusses the sources of these elements. In Section **??** a refined morphosyntactic typology of fillers is proposed, while Section **??** deals with the diverse functions of these items and Section **??** with their relation with general extenders. The following sections briefly touch upon fillers in language contact (Section **??**) and what they can tell us about the nature of language (Section **??**), and Section **??** describes the volume and its main contributions to the study of placeholders and hesitatives.

2 Fillers in the languages of the world

Fillers are known from practically every continent. The data ranges from brief mentions in grammars – possibly illustrated with a couple of examples – to in-depth studies of various aspects of their forms and uses.

In fact, fillers are rarely discussed within grammars. A search was realized in a reduced but likely representative sample of grammars (Lahaussois, to appear). Within the table of contents of 237 grammars, our query resulted in only nine successful hits: six for “filler”, two for “hesitation”, and one for “placeholder”. The key terms “hesitator”, “hesitative” and “filled pause” were not found at all. Although this search may miss grammars that do discuss fillers but use different labels, it does indicate that fillers are mostly considered a marginal question when describing a language. The hits refer to seven grammars in total (two grammars use two key terms in their table of contents), of which the oldest was published in 1993. This indicates that the fillers have only recently emerged

as a topic worthy of description in grammars. These seven grammars show a fair level of cross-linguistic coverage, with three languages from the Eurasian macro-area – Modern Welsh (King 2003), Dumi (van Driem 1993), and Japhug (Jacques 2021) – one language from the Papunesian macro-area (Papuan Malay; Kluge 2017), one from Australia (Kuuk Thaayorre; Gaby 2017), one from South America (Movima; Haude 2006), and one from Africa (Tiefo-D of Daramandugu; **HeathOuattara2021**). Only North America is not represented.

Dedicated studies on fillers also cover quite a number of languages, albeit with a bias towards the Eurasian macro-area. Fillers are well described in several East Asian languages: Japanese (Kitano 1999, Hayashi & Yoon 2006, **Seraku2022a**, b), Yoron Ryukyuan (Seraku 2020), Korean (Hayashi & Yoon 2006), and Mandarin Chinese (**ZhaoJurafsky2005**, Hayashi & Yoon 2006, Cheung 2015). They are also fairly well described for various languages of Northern Asia: Kolyma Yukaghir (Ventayol-Boada, this volume), the Tungusic languages Even, Evenki, and Negidal (Matić 2008, Klyachko 2022, Klyachko, this volume, Pakendorf, this volume), and the Turkic language Dolgan (**Däbritz2018**), as well as for some languages of the Caucasus: the Nakh-Dagestanian languages Udi, Agul (**GanenkovEtAl2010**), and Rutul (Maisak 2023), Armenian (**KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**), and Georgian, which has a placeholder verb (Amiridze 2010). In European languages, they are known from English (e.g. Enfield 2003, Palacios Martínez & Núñez Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo 2015, **Tárnyiková2019**), which is often the benchmark for comparison with other languages, and have been described in some detail for French (Mihatsch 2006, Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022, **CorminboeufJohnsen2023**), Russian (**PodlesskayaKibrik2009**, **PodlesskayaKorotaev2022**), German (Vogel 2020), Danish (Navaretta 2015), and Estonian (Keevallik 2010). As for Spanish, **Bajo-Peréz2019** and Mihatsch 2024) describe two different fillers, *fulano/fulana* and *chisme*, respectively, while Vallejos-Yopa´ n (2023) analyses the filler *este* in the variety of Spanish spoken in Amazonia.

Other dedicated studies on fillers in South America cover Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice, this volume) and the Tupí-Guaraní language Teko (Rose, this volume). As for North America, fillers have been described in fair detail in a handful of languages: Maliseet-Pasamaquoddy (LeSourd 2003), Sliammon Salish (Watanabe 2010), and Mohawk (Mithun, this volume). Very little work has been dedicated to fillers in Australian languages; a start has been made by Ponsonnet (this volume), who provides a detailed discussion of the Dalabon placeholder *kenin-jhbi.* In contrast, Austronesian fillers have generally been described in more detail, possibly because some of them show quite striking formal features (see Section **??** for details) and because a filler is reconstructed to the proto-language:

*anu 'whatchamacallit' (Nagaya 2022: 92, citing **Blust2013**)[2]. Thus we have descriptions of fillers for Nahavaq spoken in Vanuatu (Dimock 2010), Ilocano (Rubino 1996), Western Subananon (Blake 2020), and Tagalog (Nagaya 2022) of the Philippines, and for various languages spoken in Indonesia, such as Besemah (McDonnell & Billings, this volume) and Nasal (Billings & McDonnell, this volume) spoken on Sumatra, as well as Indonesian itself (Wouk 2005).

A surprising exception is Africa, for which no detailed descriptions of fillers seem (yet) to exist. Even though absence of evidence is not evidence of absence (all the more so since Heath (1999, 2008) and **HeathOuattara2021** briefly describe fillers in three unrelated languages of West Africa), the lack of dedicated descriptions of fillers in African languages is notable and possibly indicates a relative paucity of conventionalized placeholders and hesitatives in this region.

This brief overview demonstrates that – with the exception of some large and well-studied languages like Japanese or Mandarin Chinese – to date little is known about fillers in the languages of the world. The papers included in this volume thus fill in considerable gaps in our knowledge of these items, especially for the Americas, Australia, and the non-Austronesian languages of the Pacific. As mentioned above, the aim of the present chapter is to fill the gap of typological studies on fillers, which are notably rare (Hayashi & Yoon 2006, Podlesskaya 2010, Seraku 2024).

3 The origins of the fillers

Some fillers do not have any other function in the current state of the language; these we call DEDICATED. In some cases, an erstwhile lexical or phrasal source was lost or modified in the language. This is the case for the French placeholder *truc*, the origin of which is a word for theatre machinery (Mihatsch 2006), unsuspected by most speakers. But the filler might also lack a lexical source, such as the Yoron Ryukyuan filler *muna* (Seraku 2020). This concerns especially the "pause vowels" (Fox 2010: 2, **CandeaEtAl2005**) used as hesitatives in many languages. Nevertheless, Clark and Fox Clark & Fox Tree (2002: 75) "argue that *uh* and *um* are, indeed, English words. By words, we mean linguistic units that have conventional phonological shapes and meanings and are governed by the rules of syntax and prosody".

[2] In the web edition of the Austronesian Comparative Dictionary (**BlustTrussell2010-**, https://www.trussel2.com/ACD/acd-s_n1.htm?zoom_highlight=whatchamacallit, accessed 26 **July2024**), the authors define the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian form *a-nu as "thing whose name is unknown, avoided, or cannot be remembered: what?".

Dedicated fillers have been described in various languages around the world (though with labels different from 'dedicated' or 'fillers'): Yoron Ryukyuan (Seraku 2020), Ilocano (Rubino 1996: 656-661), Nahavaq (Dimock 2010: 130-131), Manambu (Aikhenvald 2008: 571-578), and Evenki and other Tungusic languages (Klyachko 2022, this volume). Furthermore, the proto-Austronesian form *anu can be assumed to have been a dedicated filler (see footnote 2).

In contrast to dedicated fillers, the source of many fillers is still synchronically available in the language. The filler might be perfectly homonymous with its (lexical or phrasal) source form, or its form might have been modified through a process of pragmaticalization, yet the similarity with its source makes the diachronic relation obvious. An example of perfect homonymy is that of the Even filler *iak*, which is indistinguishable from the interrogative 'what' (Matić 2008). An example of a transparent source is that of the French placeholder *machin*. It is obviously formally similar to *machine* 'machine' (it originates in a word for war machinery (Mihatsch 2006)), even though it differs from it phonologically (/maʃẽ/ vs /maʃin/) and morphologically (*machin* is masculine, *machine* is feminine). Similarly, the Amazonian Spanish filler *este* is clearly derived from the masculine singular proximal demonstrative, but has developed a different prosodic form (Vallejos-Yopán 2023).

Potential sources for placeholders were listed by Podlesskaya (2010). The most common source for placeholders are pronouns, especially **demonstrative and interrogative pronouns**.[3] Demonstratives used as fillers are cross-linguistically common: among others, they are frequently used in Japanese and Korean (Hayashi & Yoon 2006, **Seraku2022a**), in Austronesian languages (Wouk 2005, Kluge 2017: 388-389, Billings & McDonnell, this volume, McDonnell & Billings, this volume), in Kuuk Thaayorre from Australia (Gaby 2017: 252-254), and in Russian (**PodlesskayaKibrik200**
Interrogative-based fillers, too, are prevalent in the world's languages, having been described for Mandarin Chinese (Cheung 2015), Austronesian languages (Dimock 2010, Kluge 2017, Nagaya 2022, Billings & McDonnell, this volume), Even and Evenki (Matić 2008, Klyachko 2022), Dolgan (**Däbritz2018**), and Udi and Agul spoken in the Caucasus (**GanenkovEtAl2010**). Another common source is that of a **semantically bleached noun**, often a general noun, such as the Teko

[3]Note that Podlesskaya (2010: 12) includes personal and indefinite pronouns in her list of pronominal sources of placeholders. These seem to be extremely rare: the only examples we have come across (thanks to Wiltrud Mihatsch) are French pronouns such as *quelque chose* 'something' or *quelqu'un* 'someone' modified by determiners and which function as avoidance placeholders, as shown by the author's description: "…the pronoun is the substitute for a noun one cannot or will not provide" and "In this respect, the designative use is not unlike *truc*, *machin*, *bidule* […], and other *thingummy* and *whatsit*." (**Larrivée2009**: 10, 13).

hesitative, which originates in a general noun for non-humans (Rose, this volume). In Armenian, too, a noun with a general meaning, *ban*, can be used as a filler (**KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**), and in Kalamang the general noun functions as a placeholder with avoidance use (Visser, this volume; see Section **??**). In contrast, French *machin* and *truc* are examples of fillers whose lexical sources were semantically specific to start with. A third common source of fillers are **lexicalized constructions**, often involving an interrogative and a naming noun or verb. A typical example is English *whatchamacallit*; further fillers with a phrasal source are found in Russian (**PodlesskayaKorotaev2020**), Dalabon (Ponsonnet, this volume), and Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice, this volume). A possible source that has not been mentioned before is a **copula**: Kolyma Yukaghir spoken in Siberia has an element *ʎe-* that functions as a copula on the one hand and as a placeholder on the other. The functions can be distinguished on syntactic and intonational grounds, but the precise historical link between these two synchronically distinct items is unclear. However, Ventayol-Boada (this volume) argues in favour of the placeholder developing out of the copula.

Podlesskaya mentions that placeholders can also result from a **combination** of the potential sources mentioned above. In fact, in several languages it is not straightforward to identify which element functions as the placeholder *per se*, since these consist of multiple items. For instance, the Mandarin Chinese complex phrase *na-ge shenme* consists of the distal demonstrative *na* combined with the neutral classifier *ge* followed by the interrogative *shenme* 'what'. Hayashi & **Yoon2006** include this in their discussion of the placeholder use of **demonstratives**, saying that the distal demonstrative used as a placeholder is frequently followed by the interrogative. In contrast, Cheung (2015) includes the same expression in his discussion of "**wh-placeholders**" in Mandarin Chinese, stating that in "a wh-placeholder, the wh-word is typically preceded by the distal demonstrative marker *na* and the generic classifier *ge*" (**??**). Apart from the fact that these complementary analyses demonstrate that the placeholder lies in the eyes of the beholder, they also indicate that it is probably the entire phrase that functions as a placeholder, rather than just one of its elements.

A similar issue concerns the Japanese adnominal demonstrative *ano*. This is categorized as a "demonstrative-derived placeholder" by **Seraku2022a**, yet in the examples it occurs together with semantically vague nouns, e.g. 'thing' or 'place'. It is thus open to debate whether it is the demonstrative which carries the placeholder function or the vague noun, and it might be preferable to view the entire demonstrative-noun phrase as the placeholder, rather than just one of its elements.

Lastly, it should be noted that whereas it is relatively straightforward to identify a dedicated filler as a filler, it can be very difficult to distinguish between the source item and the filler in languages that still have both. We discuss this issue in more detail in Section **??**.

4 A morphosyntactic typology of fillers

In this section, we outline our refined morphosyntactic typology of fillers, based on three criteria:

- the referentiality of the filler;
- the morphosyntactic integration of the filler;
- the possible part of speech of the syntactic projection.

The morphosyntactic integration and referentiality of the filler let us distinguish between placeholders and hesitatives, and whether or not the syntactic projection is restricted to particular parts of speech distinguishes between specific and general fillers. We therefore obtain a four-way distinction between SPECIFIC PLACEHOLDERS (Section **??**), GENERAL PLACEHOLDERS (Section **??**), SPECIFIC HESITATIVES[4] (Section **??**), and GENERAL HESITATIVES (Section **??**). VERSATILE FILLERS (Section **??**) fulfill both placeholder and hesitative strategies; in their placeholder function they can be either general or specific.

It is important to note that many languages have several fillers, of either one or several types. In particular, Austronesian languages stand out typologically by their rich and varied repertoire of fillers. Thus, in Papuan Malay for example, apart from the placeholder *siapa* dedicated to substituting for personal names, the interrogatives *bagemana* 'how' and *apa* 'what' function as placeholders, and the demonstratives *ini* and *itu* function as placeholders for nouns and verbs as well as – albeit infrequently – as hesitatives (Kluge 2017: 288-297, 388-389).

5 Specific placeholders

Fillers that are always referential and morphosyntactically integrated are placeholders. Some placeholders are restricted to particular parts of speech or a particular subset of projected nouns or verbs and are hence SPECIFIC. Examples of

[4]Note that Dimock (2010: 136) already distinguishes between "syntactically specific delay fillers" and "general interjection hesitator".

placeholders that are restricted to particular **parts of speech** are the Georgian placeholder verb (Amiridze 2010) and the Komnzo placeholder *bäne*/*baf*, which is restricted to substituting for nouns and noun phrases (Döhler, this volume), as exemplified in (**??**).

(4) Komnzo (Döhler, this volume: XXX ex13)
zöbthé zwa\wärez/é ***bäne=me*** *(280ms) kofä* *tot=me*
first 1SG>3SG.F:RPST:PFV/aim **PH=INS** fish spear=INS
'First I aimed at it **with the whatchamacallit** ... with the fish spear.'

Examples of placeholders that are restricted to a particular **subset of projected nouns or verbs** are the Jamsay placeholder *cɛː* or *cì gɛ* 'thing' restricted to non-human nouns (Heath 2008: 475), and the Manambu placeholder verb *məgi-*, which is restricted to verbs of affect and process and cannot substitute for verbs of speech, emotion, or mental process, nor ditransitive verbs or stative verbs (Aikhenvald 2008: 575). Several languages have specific placeholders for names or terms for people (Vogel 2020). For example, in the Tungusic language Evenki there is a split between the placeholder *aŋi*/*aŋə*, which has a wide range of nominal and verbal targets, and the placeholder *uŋun*, which is restricted to replacing proper names, i.e. the names of humans, anthropomorphized animals, and places (Klyachko 2022: 214).

Sometimes a specific placeholder for verbs is derived from a specific placeholder for nouns. For example, the Algonquian language Maliseet-Pasamaquoddy has a placeholder element *íy-* that is specific for nouns; from this, two specific verbal placeholders can be derived, namely *iy-i-* (animate intransitive, illustrated in (**??**)) and *iy-ŭw-* (animate transitive; LeSourd 2003). Similarly, in Dolgan the specific verbal placeholder *kimneː-* is morphologically derived from the specific nominal placeholder *kim*, itself identical to the interrogative pronoun 'who' (**Däbritz2018**). In contrast, in Jamsay the verbal placeholder *cì gɛ kárná-* 'do (a) thing' is derived from the nominal placeholder with the help of a light verb construction (Heath 2008: 475).

(5) Maliseet-Pasamaquoddy (LeSourd 2003: 150)
nékom ***'t-olŏmi=íy-i-n,*** *'kisahqé-wsa-n.*
he **3-forward=PH-AI-SUB** (**??**)-uphill-walk-SUB
'He did something going forward, walked up the bank.'

6 General placeholders

Other placeholders, i.e. morphosyntactically integrated fillers, are GENERAL: they are polycategorial and can substitute for nouns, verbs, adjectives and even phrases. The Kolyma Yukaghir placeholder *ʎe-*, for example, can stand in for nouns, verbs, and demonstrative roots (Ventayol-Boada, this volume), and the Indonesian proximal and distal demonstratives *ini* and *itu* (Wouk 2005) can replace nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Example (**??**) shows that the placeholder *itu* can have a verbal target. It then takes verbal morphology (here patient trigger and applicative).

(6) Indonesian (Wouk 2005: 242)
trus, ini-nya semua ***di-itu-in*** *di-bilang-in.*
then this-GEN all PT-**PH**-APPL PT-say-APPL
'then everything (will) be that (will) be explained (to him)'

7 General hesitatives

We consider fillers that are never referential nor morphosyntactically integrated as hesitatives. These tend to be GENERAL, occurring in word searches of any kind or when the speaker is pondering how to continue their discourse. They can either be dedicated, like English *uh* and *uhm*, Nahavaq *a* (Dimock 2010), and Komnzo *ä* (Döhler, this volume), or have a lexical source, like Korean *ku*, *ce* and *ceki*, which are also demonstratives in that language (Hayashi & Yoon 2006). Similarly, the Kalamang word *nain* 'like' functions as a general hesitative, as illustrated in example (**??**) (Visser, this volume).

(7) Kalamang (adapted from Visser, this volume:XXX ex16)
mu-nan ***nain*** *opa* ***nain*** *neba-un me et kinkin=a saerak*
3PL-too **HES** ANA **HES** what-3POSS TOP canoe small=FOC NEG.EXIST
leng wa me
village PROX TOP
'They too, like earlier, like whatsit, there are no small canoes in this village.'

8 Specific hesitatives

The definitions of placeholders and hesitatives found in the literature do not make room for hesitatives, i.e. fillers that are neither referential nor morphosyn-

tactically integrated, that are SPECIFIC for certain types of delayed constituent. However, this type of filler is attested in Austronesian languages.

Nahavaq, a language spoken in Vanuatu, has numerous prefixal hesitatives that are "specific to the grammatical function of the word being retrieved" (Dimock 2010: 120) and that differ in form according to whether the delayed constituent is a personal name, a common noun, a location, or a verb (Dimock 2010: 121-127). For example, the hesitative *ni* is used when a speaker is trying to retrieve a common noun (**??**); this is formally related to the "nominal marker" prefixes *nV-* and *ni-* that occur with most nouns in the language and differs from the dedicated hesitative *a* or *ma* that occurs during a search for names or terms for people as well as from the hesitative *e* that indicates trouble with retrieving a location. The verbal hesitatives are different yet again: they are identical to the prefixes that index subject and mood on verbs (**??**) and differ according to the person and mood of the elusive verb; they can even carry extra prefixes, such as the negative (**??**) or irrealis marker, which are found on the delayed constituent. They therefore convey information about the delayed constituent even while the word search is going on, although they cannot be considered placeholders as such. They might at first glance resemble disfluent repetitions of the verbal prefix, but the filler always retains the vowel *e*, irrespective of the vowel of the prefix, while the vowel of the verbal subject-mood index assimilates to that of the base (**??**).

(8) Nahavaq (adapted from Dimock 2010: 122)
en vales tuwan ko-log ke-vini ***ni*** *na-lambut.*
and time INDF 3SG.IRR-go 3SG.IRR-shoot **HES** NV-rat
'and sometimes he would go and shoot a **uhm** rat.'

(9) Nahavaq (adapted from Dimock 2010: 123)
gcen ***ndu ndu*** *ndu-tig ha-haropw.*
because **HES HES** 1INCL.DU-roast DUP-quickly.over.flames
'because we've **uhm** cooked it over flames.'

(10) Nahavaq (adapted from Dimock 2010: 124)
i-noq re-vwer ***mi-s*** *mi-s-makas*
3SG.R-like 3PL-say **HES**-NEG 1EXCL.PL-NEG-come.out NEG
veq, mi-koh tey.
1EXCL.PL-be FOC
'(you know) we didn't **uhm** come out, we just stayed.'

(11) Nahavaq (adapted from Dimock 2010: 124)

*oveh, kinag **ne** no-log siley.*
whoa 1SG **HES** 1SG.R-go far
'Whoa, I have **uhm** come from far away.'

The Austronesian language Patani spoken on Halmahera also has a set of subject-specific hesitatives. These have a status in between that of free subject pronouns and verbal subject prefixes and are used to gain time while a speaker searches for an elusive verb (Sjånes **Rødvand2024**: 113-118). Additionally, in an article containing a preliminary analysis of hesitation phenomena in Western Subanon, a language of the Philippines, Blake (2020) describes three NP-specific hesitatives in addition to a general placeholder that can substitute for both nouns and verbs. The hesitatives are partially reduplicated forms of the syntactic pivot markers *og* 'pivot', *nog* 'relativizer' (**??**), and *sog* 'locative'.

(12) Western Subanon (adapted from Blake 2020: 14)
*ongon dosop og laki:, **nogog** pokpanow bu mama' nog lolingitan.*
exist also PIV man **HES** walking and looks COMP angry
'There's also a man **who-ah** is walking and looks like (he's) angry.'

The syntactically specific hesitation markers in Nahavaq, Patani, and Western Subanon do not fit into the established typologies, which contrast morphosyntactically integrated placeholders that substitute for particular words vs. interjective hesitators that are not morphosyntactically integrated and function merely to stall for time. In contrast, these Austronesian forms carry grammatical meaning and are syntactically specific, but they do not hold the place for a particular word, they merely delay the completion of the utterance (cf. Blake 2020: 16). It can only be hoped that further research on more Austronesian languages will uncover more such cases, so that the extent of variation in these syntactically specific hesitatives can be uncovered.

9 Versatile fillers

In contrast to the fillers described above, some languages have a single VERSATILE FILLER, which is used both as a hesitative and a placeholder (either specific or general). This is found for example in Ilocano, a language spoken in the Philippines, where the "versatile empty root" *kua* is used as a hesitative as in (**??**), as well as to substitute for nouns, verbs (**??**), or clauses (**??**) (Rubino 1996). A similar situation is found in the Tungusic language Negidal, where a single element functions as a general hesitative and a general placeholder (Pakendorf, this volume).

(13) Ilocano (adapted from Rubino 1996: 657)
ah, ***kua,*** *bigla nga* *n-ag-idda ti* *kawayan.*
HES **hes** suddenly LIG PST-INTR-lie:3_{SG}ABS ART bamboo
'**ah**, **um**, suddenly he lay down on the bamboo…'

(14) Ilocano (adapted from Rubino 1996: 659-660)
n-ag-kua *didiey.* *n-ag-waras-en* *dayta nga*
PST-INTR-PH DIST:DEM PST-INTR-spread-COMPL:ASP that LIG
balita-n. 'That stuff **did whatchamacallit**, that news spread.'
news-PART

(15) Ilocano (adapted from Rubino 1996: 658)
tatta n-ag-aramid-da *ngay ti* *building nga* ***kua-****.. nga kasla*
now PST-INTR-made-3_{PL}ABS PART ART building LIG **PH** LIG like
Shoemart *ti* *itsora-na.*
Shoemart:mall ART appearance-3_{S}ERG
'So then they made a building that **is whatchamacallit**.. that looks like Shoemart mall.'

In other languages, such as the Nakh-Daghestanian languages Udi and Agul or Armenian, a single form can be used as a hesitator (**??**) as well as to substitute for nouns (**??**) and – in Armenian – even adjectives, while a verbal placeholder is derived from this form with a light verb (**??**) (Khurshudyan & Podlesskaya 2006: 81, **KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**, **GanenkovEtAl2010**).

(16) Armenian (adapted from **KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**: 7)
na ***ban*** *ibrev petkh a* *gar* *ēsor*
3SG **HES** as.if must AUX.PRS.3 come.PST.3 today
'He, **uhm**, seems to have been supposed to come today.'

(17) Armenian (adapted from **KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**: 9)
hiš-um *es* ***ban-ə*** *ber-el* *ēir* *a*
remember-IPFV AUX.2SG **PH-DEF** bring-PFV AUX.PST.2SG camera-DEF
parat-ə …

'Do you remember, you brought **the whatchamacallit**, the camera, ….'

(18) Armenian (adapted from **KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**: 13)

yes ēl mi angam ***ban ar-echi*** *gn-achi ēd sayth-ə*
1SG also one time **PH** **do-AOR.1SG** go-AOR.1SG this site-DEF
spyware-i …
spyware-GEN
'I also once **did whatchamacallit**, went onto this site "spyware"…'

Surprisingly, such versatile fillers are not uncommon in the world's languages: apart from the languages mentioned above, they are found in Even and Evenki (Matić 2008, Klyachko 2022), Mandarin Chinese (Hayashi & Yoon 2006), Tagalog (Nagaya 2022), Nasal (Billings & McDonnell, this volume), Besemah (McDonnell & Billings, this volume) Papuan Malay (Kluge 2017: 388-389), Manambu (Aikhenvald 2008: 573-574), Amazonian Spanish (Vallejos-Yopán 2023), Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice, this volume), Sliammon Salish (Watanabe 2010) and French (Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022). It is possible that versatile fillers have been overlooked by researchers biased by the terminological dichotomy of placeholders vs. hesitatives, and that close examination of naturally occurring fillers will reveal even more examples.

10 Extended functions of fillers

Fillers are mainly discussed in the light of disfluencies, e.g. Hayashi & Yoon (2006), who focus on "demonstratives as 'filler words' in contexts where speakers **encounter trouble** recalling a word or selecting the best word to use to designate some entity during the course of producing an utterance" (485, our highlighting). Similarly, the paper by Podlesskaya (2010) "focuses on a type of discourse marker that **signals production difficulties** in spontaneous spoken discourse" (11, our highlighting). However, it was pointed out early on (e.g. Enfield 2003) that placeholders can be used intentionally by speakers, with a variety of functions, namely socially motivated avoidance of a particular term (Section **??**), to manage interactions (Section **??**), and to refer to arbitrary referents (Section **??**). However, it should be noted that in studies based on oral corpora it is not always clear what motivates particular instances of filler use.

11 Socially motivated functions

Socially motivated intentional uses have been given different labels in the literature: "therapeutic" vs. "diplomatic" (**Tárnyiková2019**), "communicative" vs. "social" (Seraku 2020), and "PH_A" for placeholders motivated by the speakers'

ability vs. "PH_P" for uses motivated by the speakers' preference (Seraku 2024). Among the socially motivated intentional uses, two major sub-functions can be distinguished, namely the "avoidance" of socially sensitive terms (aka taboo) and the "conspiratorial" function, used "to prevent potentially overhearing third parties from understanding, and/or to create a collusive air between interlocutors" (Enfield 2003: 106, see also Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 501-507, Keevallik 2010, Cheung 2015). Example (**??**) shows the use of a placeholder to avoid the embarrassment due to the explicitness of "die". Example (**??**) shows the use of a placeholder to prevent dinner guests from understanding the hosts' plan for a surprise.

(19) Mandarin Chinese (adapted from Cheung 2015: 276)
Na ge lao taitai yijing na-ge ***shenme-le***.
DEM CLF old lady already DEM-CLF **ph**-PFV
'The old lady has already … **you-know-what-ed** (= died).'

(20) English (**English2003**)
[After dinner, the host says to his wife] I think it's time to serve the **you-know-whats** (=peaches)

Palacios Martínez & Núñez Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo (2015) list several pragmatic meanings of English placeholders, such as when they are used derogatorily, as insults, with the goal of not sounding pretentious, as euphemisms, and informally to build in-group identity. A further intentional strategy of placeholders are "rhetorical" uses, found for instance with Japanese demonstrative-derived placeholders used in internet articles and blog posts: these are written not in the *hiragana* script standardly used for demonstratives, but in the distinct *katakana* script, thus visibly signalling their special function to the reader (**Seraku2022a**). Furthermore, it is possible that in the Tupi-Guarani language Teko a particular construction involving the filler has a euphemistic or suspense-creating function (Rose, this volume); however, this cannot be asserted with certainty due to the small number of examples.

Placeholders can be functionally specific, with forms used only in contexts of disfluency, such as *uŋun* in Negidal (Pakendorf, this volume), or forms used only in socially motivated contexts, where the target is mostly omitted, such as Nahavaq *na-lan* (Dimock 2010: 130-131). In several languages, both types of functionally specific placeholders co-exist. For example, in Kuuk Thaayorre, a Pama-Nyungan language of northern Australia, the distal demonstrative *yuun-hul* serves as a filler in situations where the speaker wants to "signal that the inaccessibility of the target lexeme […] is disruptive to the flow of speech, and must

be repaired before proceeding" (Gaby 2017: 253), whereas the proximal demonstrative *inhul* is used when the speaker feels that it is unnecessary or even undesirable to fill in the target, such as in taboo situations (Gaby 2017: 254). English makes a similar distinction between *whatchamacallit*, used when a speaker cannot retrieve or doesn't know the target word, and *you-know-what*, used when the speaker does not want to utter the target for particular social reasons (Enfield 2003: 105-107). Similarly, Kalamang has distinct placeholders used for word retrieval and taboo substitution (Visser, this volume). Thus, in these languages the distinction between "ability" and "preference" (Seraku 2024) is formally marked. Such functional specificity is far from being generalized, however: speakers of the Papuan language Komnzo and the Austronesian language Nasal use the same filler in taboo situations as in situations of word search (Döhler, this volume; Billings & McDonnell, this volume).

12 Interaction management

Several studies have demonstrated that fillers (both hesitators and placeholders) are used not only in contexts of word search or trouble with speech planning, but also to manage interactions in discourse (e.g. **HuangTanangkingsing2005**, Keevallik 2010: 162-167, Watanabe 2010: 178, Jehoul et al. 2016, Kosmala & Crible 2022). Clark and Fox Clark & Fox Tree (2002: 90) list many interpretations of the English fillers that are related to interaction management, like "speakers want to keep the floor", "speakers want to cede the floor", "speakers want the next turn", among others. Allwood et al. (2005) therefore prefer to use the term 'Own Communication Management' to cover phenomena otherwise referred to as 'hesitation', 'disfluency', or 'self-repair', and Kosmala & **Crible2022** introduce the term 'fluenceme' for elements like fillers, in order to underline their "potential to serve both fluent and disfluent functions". Example (**??**) shows how a filler (the Estonian pronominal demonstrative *see*) is used turn-initially, specifically here to initiate a "reason-for-the-call turn" here.

(21) Estonian (Keevallik 2010: 164)[5]
*=**see**, .h ma tahsin seda küsida et*
FIL I want:PST:1SG this:PRT ask:INF that
'**See**, .h I wanted to ask you'

[5]The equal sign in the text line indicates "latching of turns or words" (**Keevallit2010**).

13 Arbitrary reference

Even though it has been posited that the prototypical use of a placeholder is to signal to the hearer that a specific referent should be looked for in the context (e.g. Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022: 300), **Seraku2022b** identifies arbitrary reference as a function of Japanese and Korean interrogative-derived and Romanian and Bulgarian demonstrative-derived placeholders (??). In such uses, the placeholder is not used to substitute for a specific referent, but precisely to fill in for some arbitrary entity.

(22) Japanese (**Seraku2022b**)
Boku jitsuwa mainichi nikki kai-teru-ndesu. *Kyoo-wa* ***nani-ga***
1SG in.fact every.day diary write-IPFV-MM.HON today-TOP **PH**-NOM
at-ta-toka ***nanishi-ta-toka nani*** *tabe-ta-toka.*
happen-PST-etc. **PH**-PST-etc. **PH** eat-PST-etc.
'[In this post, the writer conveys that writing up a diary every day reduces his stress.] In fact, I write in my diary every day, like "**Such-and-such** happened today," "I did **such-and-such**," "I ate **such-and-such**," and so on.'

14 Issues with extended functions

This section has presented several functions of fillers beyond their use in disfluency. It should be noted, however, that the extended functions of placeholders (avoidance and conspiratorial use, interaction management or arbitrary reference) have not been identified for dedicated placeholders with opaque etymology, but only for placeholders derived from demonstratives, interrogative pronouns, or general/semantically empty nouns. This can partly be explained by the fact that certain functions have only recently been identified, such as the rhetorical or the arbitrary reference function (**Seraku2022a**, b). It is thus possible that some dedicated fillers might be found to have these functions if more attention is directed to finding them. Nevertheless, the paucity of dedicated filler items with extended functions raises the question whether these extensions are actually functions of the filler, or whether they aren't rather functions of the base form, i.e. the demonstrative, interrogative, or general noun, which developed into a filler on the one hand and into a marker of arbitrary reference or rhetorical flag on the other.

15 Fillers and general extenders

Several descriptions of fillers include general extenders in the scope of their discussion (e.g. Aikhenvald 2008: 573-575, **GanenkovEtAl2010**, Maisak 2023, Klyachko, this volume, Rose, this volume). Such general extender expressions add an item with non-specific reference to an existing (even minimal) list, thus creating an "ad hoc category" (**MauriSansò2018**). They are optional structures typically made of a conjunction and a noun phrase and occur in phrase- or clause-final position (**OverstreetYule2021**: 1) and can be translated as "and so on" or " et cetera". What fillers, and notably placeholders, and general extenders have in common is that they both belong to the category of vague language. In addition, both fillers and general extenders frequently develop out of general nouns or interrogatives (Hayashi & Yoon 2006; **MauriSansò2018**: 28), and are therefore formally related. For instance, the *baʔe* root in Teko is used as a noun for non-humans (**??**), as a hesitative (**??**), and as a general extender (**??**).

(23) Teko (Rose, this volume, XXX)
o-ho-pa ***baʔe****-kom-a=nam o-apɨg=o kupa=o*
3-go-COMPL**thing**-PL-REF=when 3-sit=CONT PL.S=CONT
'When all the **animals** had left, they (the men) sat down.'

(24) Teko (Rose, this volume, XXX)
kob (0.3) pitaŋ-am (2.3) ***baʔe*** *(1.2)kɨto-ɾ-ehe e-iba*
EXIST child-TRANSF **HES** frog-RELN-with 3-pet
'There is a child with his **um**… pet frog.' 13.001

(25) Teko (Rose, this volume, XXX)
dati arakapusa (0.8), dati ʃort, t-ɨɾu, EXIST.NEG gun EXIST.NEG shorts
baʔe-kom
NSP-clothes thing-PL

'There was no gun, no shorts, no clothes, **and so on**.'

The diachronic link between fillers and general extenders remains to be investigated; three scenarios are found in the literature. Firstly, the general extender could have developed out of the filler, as argued for Udi and Agul by **GanenkovEtAl2010**. Secondly, the general extender may have been the base from which the filler developed. For example, Klyachko (this volume) suggests that in some Tungusic languages the interrogative-based placeholders developed

under the influence of the use of the interrogative stem as a general extender found in the entire family. Thirdly, it is possible that the source element developed separately into a filler and into a general extender, as with the extended functions of fillers discussed in Section **??**; this is the analysis provided by Rose (this volume) for Teko.

16 Fillers in language contact

Very little is known about the impact of language contact on the use of fillers. Data from Spanish-English bilinguals in Boston show that the age of arrival in the US and the amount of Spanish-exclusive communication have an impact on the phonetic shape of the hesitator *uh*: individuals who arrived before late adolescence (~15 years of age) or who were born in the US and who have relatively few interlocutors with whom they use exclusively Spanish are far more likely to use a central vowel ([a] or [ə]) as their hesitator than the form commonly found in Spanish, namely [e] (**ErkerVidal-Covas2022**). This difference is likely to be due to the influence of English and demonstrates that language contact can have an impact on the form of the hesitator. Spanish borrowed a placeholder with arbitrary reference, *fulano*/*fulana*, from Arabic, with earliest attestations from the Middle Ages (**GerhalterSalaaoui2020**). In both languages the placeholder was predominantly used in juridical and ritual texts where it replaced proper nouns, such as in prescriptions as to what the groom and bride were to say during a marriage ceremony.

Borrowed fillers are further mentioned for Indonesian (placeholder *anu*, from Javanese; Williams 2009: 9), Kalamang (filler *apa* borrowed from Indonesian; Visser, this volume), Kolyma Yukaghir and Tungusic languages (demonstrative-derived filler *èto* borrowed from Russian; Ventayol-Boada, this volume, and Klyachko, this volume, respectively), and Northern Pastaza Kichwa (demonstrative-derived hesitative *este* from Spanish; Rice, this volume). In Besemah, contact influence from Jakarta Indonesian might have increased the frequency of use of the demonstrative-derived filler *ini* over the dedicated filler *anu* (McDonnell & Billings, this volume). However, while these brief descriptions mention the presence of these elements, which were mostly borrowed from the sociopolitically dominant language, they do not provide information on the relative frequency of the borrowed vs. the indigenous forms,[6] and they also leave open the question to what extent these fillers of foreign origin are really integrated into the

[6] An exception is the presentation by **EgorovaEtAl2021** on borrowed fillers in Evenki, who mention that in oral recordings native fillers are preferred over borrowed ones, even by semi-speakers (with indigenous fillers occuring more than 4.5 times as often as borrowed ones).

language as opposed to their occurring as nonce borrowings or in code-switches. It is thus clear that there is still a lot of scope for research in the domain of filler forms and functions in language contact situations.

17 Fillers and the nature of language

Fillers are not only important from a descriptive point of view, but also for their potential to enlighten us on the way how speech is produced and how it functions in interaction. The fact that placeholders mirror the morphology of their targets, such as both case and evidential markers in Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice, this volume), aspect and mood plus subject marking in Evenki, as illustrated in (**??**), or case and possessive marking in Negidal (Pakendorf, this volume), provides evidence for the fact that the syntactic structure of an utterance is in place before the target lexeme is accessed.

(26) Evenki (adapted from Klyachko 2022: 209)
ďəm-muː-l-mi ***aŋi-ŋna-kal*** *guː-səː*
eat-DES-INCH-CVCOND **PH**-HAB-IMP.2SG say-PANT
əri-ŋ-mə-w *tuge: sʲiwu-ŋna-kal*
this-INDR.POSS-ACC-1SG.POSS so lick-HAB-IMP.2SG
'If you get hungry, he said, **do that thing**, lick this your <paw> so.'

Mismatches between the placeholder and the target also demonstrate that the syntactic specifications of an utterance are put in place early on. Thus, in Negidal mismatches between case morphemes on the placeholder and the target tend to be semantically congruent, involving cases that can both be used to mark goals or direct objects, for example (Pakendorf, this volume). Similarly, the Russian complex placeholder *ètot... kak ego* (literally 'this one .... how is it (called), or: what is its (name))' carries the same gender and number as the target.[7] However, in some cases there is a mismatch in gender between the placeholder and the target, such as in (**??**), where the placeholder carries feminine gender (also found on the modifier *gosudarstvennuju* 'State'), but the target is neutral gender. Here, it is probable that the initial target of the placeholder was the feminine-gender word *premija* 'bonus', which was replaced with the final target *voznagraždenie* 'reward'. This shows that in speech production the grammatical specifications of an item, such as grammatical gender, are accessed independently and in advance of the actual lexeme (**PodlesskayaKorotaev2022**: 68-69).

[7]The first element, the proximal demonstrative *ètot~èta~èto* also takes the case of the target; it can, however, also stand in the invariant neuter gender form *èto*.

(27) Russian (adapted from **PodlesskayaKorotaev2022**: 68)
*nu ladno/ polučiš' gosudarstvennuju... **èto... kak eë...***
well OK you.will.get State[ADJ.F] **PH**[F] reward[N]
voznagraždenie [...]

'Well, OK, you will receive a State **whatchamacallit**, reward...'

18 Scope and contribution of the volume

This section first presents the scope of the volume in terms of the languages discussed (19), then discusses major issues (8.2) and emerging topics (8.3). In our discussion, we restrict ourselves to the languages of the volume.

19 Languages discussed in the volume

As summarized in Table 1, fillers in 16 languages are discussed in this volume, with 10 chapters being devoted to individual languages and the chapter by Klyachko providing a comparison of fillers and general extenders in the Tungusic family as a whole. The table lists the languages in geographical order, from west to east and north to south. This is also the order of inclusion in the volume.

The languages represented in this volume are found in different macro-areas (Figure **??**). Papunesia is the best represented, with descriptions of fillers in both Austronesian and Papuan languages, while African languages are unfortunately not included at all. Thus the volume unintentionally mirrors the general state of cross-linguistic descriptions (Section **??**).

All studies are based on (mostly first-hand) corpora of oral recordings, sometimes supplemented with video recordings, which let the authors touch upon the gestures that accompany particular uses of fillers (see Section **??**). While most chapters provide synchronic descriptions of fillers, three chapters deal with diachronic aspects to various extents: Ventayol-Boada suggests that the Kolyma Yukaghir placeholder may have developed out of the copula *ʎe-*, and Rice proposes that the Northern Pastaza Kichwa filler *mashti* developed out of the phrase "what name", with the placeholder uses developing first via phonetic erosion and semantic bleaching. The placeholder later evolved into both a hesitative (via cooptation) and a pro-verb (a case of (re)lexicalization). Rose discusses the development of discourse functions of the general noun with non-human reference *baʔe* in Teko: the general noun probably developed into a hesitative via placeholder uses, in a process that involved semantic bleaching, reanalysis, extension,

Table 1: Languages discussed in the present volume.

Language	**Glottocode**	**Macro-area**	**Family**	**Author**
Evenki	even1259	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Even	even1260	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Udihe	udih1248	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Oroch	oroc1248	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Nanai	nana1257	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Kur-Urmi Nanai	kuro1242	Eurasia	Tungusic	Klyachko
Negidal	negi1245	Eurasia	Tungusic	Pakendorf, Klyachko
Kolyma Yukaghir	sout2750	Eurasia	Yukaghir	Ventayol-Boada
Besemah	cent2053	Papunesia	Austronesian	McDonnell & Billings
Nasal	nasa1239	Papunesia	Austronesian	Billings & McDonnell
Kalamang	kara1499	Papunesia	West Bomberai	Visser
Komnzo	komn1238	Papunesia	Yam	Döhler
Dalabon	ngal1292	Australia	Gunwinyguan	Ponsonnet
Mohawk	moha1259	North America	Iroquoian	Mithun
Northern Pastaza Kichwa	nort2973	South America	Quechuan	Rice
Teko	emer1243	South America	Tupian	Rose

Figure 1: Map of the languages studied in the volume

and prosodic changes. The hesitative may have been the source for the general verb 'do', though that remains somewhat speculative due to the lack of bridging contexts in the corpus. In contrast, the general noun independently developed interrogative, general extender, rhetoric and nominalization functions.

20 Major issues

This section highlights four major issues identified on the basis of the chapters within this volume: 1) the distinction between fillers and related elements; 2) the distinction between the hesitative and the placeholder uses of a given filler; 3) the rather low frequency of overt targets after placeholders in several languages; and 4) individual speaker variation.

20.1 Methodological issues with identifying fillers

Dedicated fillers can straightforwardly be identified as such; however, disentangling filler uses from uses of the source item (i.e. demonstrative, interrogative, or general noun) or from future developments[8] can be problematic in languages

[8]In this volume, fillers are described as developing into predicates (verb 'make' in Teko, proverb in Mashti, and copula in Kolyma Yukaghir), and connectors (in Komnzo) or markers of

where both items co-occur. Criteria used by the authors of the chapters in the present volume to distinguish fillers from their sources are the following:

- form
- prosody
- position within utterances
- function in the discourse structure
- semantics
- morphological combinatorics
- syntactic distribution

The chapter by Rose, for example, shows how the syntactic, morphological, semantic and prosodic characteristics of *baʔe* in Teko are sufficient to distinguish three lexical units and identify particular occurrences as either nouns, verbs or hesitators. As a noun for non-human referents, *baʔe* is found in the syntactic position of nominals, takes nominal morphology, refers to non-human entities, and is fully integrated in the phrase in which it occurs. As a verb, *baʔe* is found in the syntactic position of verbs and takes verbal morphology. As a hesitator, *baʔe* does not show a restricted syntactic distribution, it never takes any morphology, can be found before delayed constituents referring to human entities, and is often lengthened and surrounded by pauses.

However, there are limits to the use of formal criteria to distinguish fillers from their sources or their future developments. For example, in Teko, the identification of placeholder uses of the same form *baʔe*, distinct from the basic general noun, is not straightforward. The reverse might also be true: Döhler explains how in a first analysis of Komnzo *bäne* he considered it to be both a demonstrative and a placeholder. However, a careful examination of all text examples leads him to the conclusion that all occurrences are actually linked to disfluency, and that nowadays *bäne* is not a demonstrative any more. In Mohawk, the proximal and distal demonstratives are used both in contexts of disfluency as hesitators and especially as placeholders, but they are also found in contexts without disfluency: first, in a discourse structure where they basically allow the speakers to hold the floor, and second in a complex syntactic structure, marking the fact

dependency between clauses (in Mohawk).

that a complement or relative clause follows. However, the different uses cannot be distinguished by their prosody, their morphology (they do not take any), or their position. In the lack of formal evidence for the speaker's communicative intention, the analysis is based solely on the investigator's interpretation of the discourse function.

20.2 Indeterminacy of placeholder and hesitative use in versatile fillers

Hesitatives and placeholders are often portrayed as being separate elements that are clearly distinguishable (most notably in Hayashi & Yoon 2006). This is also found by Visser for Kalamang, where hesitatives and placeholders are distinct lexical items with no functional overlap. In other languages the filler can straightforwardly be analysed as being mostly a hesitative, as in Teko (Rose), or a placeholder, as in Kolyma Yukaghir (Ventayol-Boada), Dalabon (Ponsonnet), and Mohawk (Mithun). However, there are also languages with versatile fillers which are used both as hesitatives and placeholders (Section **??**), namely Negidal (Pakendorf), Besemah (McDonnell & Billings), Nasal (Billings & McDonnell), and Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice). The relative frequency of one or the other strategy differs across the languages: while in Nasal the demonstrative-derived fillers predominantly function as placeholders and the interrogative mainly functions as a hesitative, in Besemah placeholder uses dominate for all filler forms. Similarly, in Negidal placeholder uses are about twice as frequent as hesitative uses; in contrast, in Northern Pastaza Kichwa the hesitative use is by far the most frequent in the corpus, even though it can be assumed to have developed out of the placeholder use.

What is striking, however, is that in languages with versatile fillers it is at times hard or even impossible to determine what function a particular token of the filler might have, in spite of analyses of prosody and intonation. These studies thus demonstrate that in some languages the filler is indeed a single polyfunctional item with a continuum of uses from hesitative to placeholder. Whether this indeterminacy also holds for the other languages discussed in Section **??** would need to be verified with prosodic analyses.

20.3 Low frequency of overt targets

A third striking result is that targets are regularly not present after a placeholder in several languages discussed in the volume, namely in Negidal (Pakendorf), Kolyma Yukaghir (Ventayol-Boada), Besemah (McDonnell & Billings),

Nasal (Billings & McDonnell), Kalamang (Visser), and Dalabon (Ponsonnet). For instance, the Negidal placeholder is followed by an overt target in 70% of its occurrences as a nominal placeholder, but in only 50% of its occurrences as a verbal placeholder. Even more surprising, in Besemah and Kalamang targets are actually more frequently absent than present after a placeholder. McDonnell & Billings indicate that the Besemah placeholders are followed by a target (a repair, in their terminology), in only one third of all occurrences.

This is an important finding, since there is a bias in the literature towards examples with overt targets for obvious expository reasons (openly acknowledged by Dimock 2010). This bias generates an implicit expectation that a placeholder will of necessity be followed by its target – a situation that is explicit in the terminological choice made by **KhurshudyanPodlesskaya2006**, who distinguish between placeholders (*preparativnaja podstanovka*, literally "preparatory replacement"), which are followed by their target, and "approximate nominalizations" (*priblizitel'naja nominalizacija*), which lack an overt target. The corpus-based studies included in the volume, with meticulous coding of each occurrence of the placeholders in a given language, thus provide important insights into the actual nature of placeholders. For instance, it is possible that placeholders do not always function as substitutes of specific targets that elude the speaker (and hence do not necessarily have the function to "signal that the speaker is not able or willing to provide a more specific target expression" (Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022: 300)), but that these semantically vague expressions maintain or develop some referential uses.

20.4 Variation between speakers

Finally, several studies in the volume (Pakendorf, Ventayol-Boada, McDonnell & Billings, Visser, and Ponsonnet) find notable differences in the frequency of use of fillers between individual speakers of a language, as also found for hesitatives among German women (**BraunEtAl2023**) and placeholders among English speakers of various ages (Palacios Martínez & Núñez Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo 2015). Such differences among speakers can partly be explained by their sociolinguistic profile: McDonnell & Billings show that younger speakers of Besemah, and especially those that have spent time outside of the region, strongly prefer the demonstrative pronoun *ini* over the dedicated filler *anu*. The authors explain this preference by contact with Jakarta Indonesian, which employs demonstrative pronouns as fillers. In contrast, Ponsonnet finds that it is individual speakers' preferences, which she calls 'styles', that determine placeholder use in Dalabon, with one speaker favouring lexical accuracy and hence

using the placeholder to substitute for a (mostly nominal) target that is subsequently supplied, while another speaker favours fluidity of speech and therefore does not necessarily supply the target, with the placeholder standing in with nearly equal frequency for verbs and nouns. These styles are not strictly correlated with the speakers' proficiency. Pakendorf also suggests that the differences in the frequency of use of the Negidal filler *uŋun*, as well as the differences in choice between hesitatives and placeholders, can only be partly explained by the proficiency of the speakers: while a semi-speaker of Negidal indeed uses it most frequently, a very proficient speaker also uses fillers very often (see Section **??** for other explanations).

21 Emerging topics

This section broaches several topics that have to date been rarely discussed in the literature, but which are touched upon in the studies included in the volume, and which we consider worth exploring in greater detail and in diverse languages in the future: the interaction of fillers 1) with prosody, 2) with other markers of disfluency or other fillers, 3) with gestures, and 4) the frequency of fillers in discourse as well as 5) the impact of language contact on fillers.

21.1 Fillers and prosody

Most chapters in the volume include some discussion of prosody, a topic with little prior coverage in the cross-linguistic literature on fillers (but see Dimock 2010, **PodlesskayaKorotaev2022**, Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022, and Vallejos-Yopa´n 2023). In the chapters of the volume, the discussion mostly focuses on duration (i.e. lengthening of fillers) and pauses, but sometimes also deals with prosodic contours. The prosodic studies may have two different goals. Firstly, some authors use prosody to **distinguish fillers from homonymous forms**. Rose uses prosodic features to investigate the distinction between the Teko hesitator and its source noun *ba?e*. The hesitator is prosodically more salient via final lengthening, a higher frequency of pauses preceding and following it, and longer duration of following pauses. In contrast, Ventayol-Boada does not find pauses to be relevant for distinguishing the filler and copula uses of *ʎe-* in Kolyma Yukaghir; rather, it is the position of the filler and the number of words in the intonation unit as well as the intonation contour that discriminate the two uses. In Komnzo, the close examination of the prosody of all occurrences of *bäne* leads Döhler to the conclusion that it is not a proper demonstrative in synchrony anymore, but always a placeholder. Secondly, some authors investigate how prosody correlates with

different uses of the same filler. Rice compares the features of prosodic lengthening and pauses in relation to the different uses of the Northern Pastaza Kichwa *mashti* element, namely as a hesitative, a placeholder, and a pro-verb. In general, the hesitative use attracts more pauses and prosodic lengthening. McDonnell & Billings also show that hesitator uses of Besemah fillers are more frequently associated with other disfluency cues than their placeholder uses. In contrast, Pakendorf and Mithun do not find any correlation between prosodic patterns and uses of fillers as hesitatives or placeholders in Negidal and Mohawk, respectively, mirroring the lack of distinction between the hesitative and placeholder strategies of fillers in French *truc* and *machin* (Hennecke & Mihatsch 2022). The lack of a cross-linguistically clear pattern concerning the role of prosody with respect to fillers motivates our call for further research on that question.

21.2 Fillers and other markers of disfluency

Several authors (McDonnell & Billings, Döhler, Rice) also touch upon other markers that accompany hesitations, essentially non-lexical ones like false starts, glottalization, and repetitions, in addition to pauses and lengthening. Furthermore, some authors mention the existence of other fillers in the language they study (Visser, Döhler, Rice). How the different lexical fillers and other types of filled pauses combine or complement each other is worth being investigated in more detail in more languages.

21.3 Fillers and co-gestures

Three chapters (Pakendorf, Döhler, Rice) include some discussion of gestures associated with fillers, a topic rarely approached for languages other than English (but see Hayashi 2003 on Japanese, Navaretta 2015 on Danish, and **GrazianoGullberg2018** and Kosmala 2024 for comparative studies). Rice offers a systematic study of three types of gestures accompanying the Northern Pastaza Kichwa filler *mashti*: gaze aversion, excessive blinking and manual gestures. Manual gestures can themselves undergo disfluency, such as being "on hold", repeated, or corrected. In general, it seems that gaze aversion, manual gestures, and gestural disfluency are often associated with the filler. Just like prosodic cues, excessive blinking and gestural disfluency occur more with the hesitative than with the placeholder use of *mashti*. Döhler finds that about two thirds of the Komnzo placeholders are accompanied by a gesture, either hand gestures, or lip- or head- pointing gestures, which thus provide a "parallel support channel", helping the speaker find and the hearer identify the target. Hand gestures are the most common, often pointing

to the referent (in line with the demonstrative origin of the placeholder). Other gestures identify a visible target or re-enact it. In Negidal, Pakendorf finds the same type of gestures accompanying the versatile filler *uŋun* as those found in Northern Pastaza Kichwa and in Komnzo: gaze aversion, pointing gestures, and re-enacting gestures. She calls for a systematic study of gestures in future investigations of fillers in the languages of the world, with a close look at the timing of the gesture and the utterance of the filler, and the different possible functions of the filler.

21.4 Frequency of fillers

As much as possible, the authors of the chapters included frequency counts of the fillers under study in their corpus (remember that all studies in the volume are corpus-based). The frequency of fillers can vary depending on various parameters, related to the speaker (Section **??**), content and context of the utterance, as well as the speech situation (**CorleyMartin2008**). For example, differences in the frequency of occurrences of fillers can partly be explained by genre and recording situation. Thus, Visser finds that placeholders are more common in conversations than in narratives, probably because the former are less planned. Also, Visser interprets differences in the individual speakers' uses of fillers in her Kalamang corpus as being mainly related to the topic of the conversation: one speaker used very many fillers in a recording in which he was urged to talk about herbal medicine and where he had to search his memory for names of plants. Similarly, Pakendorf finds that an excellent Negidal speaker uses the filler very frequently while telling traditional fairy tales; here, it might be the cultural pressure to tell such tales in a particular manner that led him to hesitate frequently.

A more general question is whether there are cultural differences in the overall frequency of fillers. It is striking that in all the chapters of the volume, the frequency of fillers in the various languages is generally higher than that found in preceding studies (**ZhaoJurafsky2005**, **PodlesskayaKibrik2009**). This high frequency of use of fillers found in typologically and geographically disparate languages indicates that they are far from being the marginal phenomenon they have been considered to date, leading us to call for more dedicated studies on fillers in the languages of the world.

21.5 Borrowed fillers

Finally, as briefly discussed in Section **??** there is sporadic mention of borrowed fillers in some chapters included in the volume (Klyachko, Ventayol-Boada, Visser,

Rice). However, detailed studies of the effect of language contact on the form, frequency, and usage patterns of fillers are still missing. Given that discourse markers such as "fillers, tags, interjections, and hesitation markers" are among the most contact-sensitive elements of language (Matras 2009: 193), this would constitute a fruitful field for further research.

Abbreviations

[9]

AI	animate intransitive	NSP	non-specific possessor
ANA	anaphoric demonstrative	NV	nV- nominal prefix
AOR	aorist	PANT	anterior participle
ASP	aspect	PART	particle
COMPL	completive	PART.O	partitive object
CONT	continuative	PF	particle-final
CVCOND	conditional converb	PH	placeholder
DES	desiderative	PIMP	past imperfective
DUP	reduplication	PIV	pivot
EXIST	existential	PRT	partitive
FIL	filler	PT	patient trigger
HAB	habitual	R	realis
HES	hesitative	REF	referential
HON	honorific	RELN	relational
INCH	inchoative	RPST	recent past
INDR.POSS	indirect possession	SEQ	sequential
LIG	ligature	SUB	subordinative
MM	modal marker	TRANSF	transfer

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[9]This list includes only the glosses which are not found in the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

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