

Uhm I've been wondering ... why do people use non-lexical vocalisations?

Scott Barnes

Non-lexical vocalisations (e.g., *uh*, *um*) are a pervasive feature of spoken language (and have been increasingly represented in written language). These objects have received consistent (but modest) research attention from a number of different perspectives. Some have emphasized the role of non-lexical vocalizations in compensating for the absence of words (calling them, e.g., undesirable noise (!), filled pauses, hesitation markers), while others have advocated strongly for their status as distinctive discourse markers, and, in some cases, genuine words. Researchers have also made a variety of claims about the influence of macrosocial factors (e.g., gender), language competency, communicative activity, and individual differences on their use. There is, however, little research that closely examines how speakers employ *uh(m)* to manage interactional contingencies. With this talk, I will present some claims and findings about the distribution and functions of *uh(m)*, critically explore its status as a word, and present some in-progress analyses of its role in turns-at-talk; particularly, how speakers can employ *uh(m)* to project continuation in turn-constructive units (TCUs) and turns.

Bio

Scott Barnes is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University, and Course Director of the Master of Speech and Language Pathology. His research focuses on everyday conversations, and particularly those involving people with communication disabilities. Scott uses conversation analysis to explore the interfaces between basic systems in conversation (e.g., turn-taking, repair), language, cognition, and related impairments.