Parameters for typological variation of placeholders

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The paper focuses on a type of discourse marker that signals production difficulties in spontaneous spoken discourse. Hesitation markers of this type, conventionally termed placeholders, mainly have a pronominal origin and serve as a preparatory substitute for a delayed constituent. Based on first-hand data of spoken Russian and Armenian, as well as on earlier reported data (on Samoyedic, Tungusic, Austronesian, East Caucasian languages, inter alia), a set of parameters for typological variation of placeholders across languages is suggested, including possible types of syntactic constituents for which placeholders may substitute and constraints on morphological marking placeholders can replicate. Placeholders are placed among other lexical and grammatical resources that allow the speaker to refer to objects and events for which the speaker fails to retrieve the exact name, or simply finds the exact name to be unnecessary or inappropriate.

Keywords: speech disfluency; placeholder; typology; Russian; Armenian

The paper focuses on a type of discourse marker that signals production difficulties in spontaneous spoken discourse. Hesitation markers of this type, conventionally termed placeholders with other attested terms being "lexical fillers" and "oblitive nouns/verbs" (cf. Podlesskaya 2006; Podlesskaya & Kibrik 2006, 2009; Fox et al. 1996; Hayashi & Yoon 2006; Wouk 2005) mainly have a pronominal origin and serve as a preparatory substitute for a delayed constituent. According to (Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 490) a placeholder

i. is a referential expression that is used as a substitute for a specific lexical item that has momentarily eluded the speaker (and which is often specified subsequently as a result of a word search), and ...

ii. it occupies a syntactic slot that would have been occupied by the target word, and thus constitutes a part of the syntactic structure under construction.

A placeholder may fully or partially mirror the grammatical shaping of its target, as in (1), where the proximal demonstrative pronoun eti is used as a placeholder...
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1. Where do placeholders come from – pronouns or ‘thing’-nouns?

Placeholders are usually recruited from the following lexical categories:

a. Actual personal (third person), demonstrative, indefinite or interrogative pronouns – e.g. Russian proximal eto ‘this’, Japanese adnominal distal ano ‘that’ and pronominal distal are (Watanabe 2002; Hayashi & Yoon 2006 and this volume), Agul (East Caucasian) fiš ‘who’, fi ‘what’ (Ganenkov, Lander & Maisak 2007 and this volume), Udi (East Caucasian) he ‘what’, which

b. Actual semantically bleached nouns – e.g. Armenian ban ‘thing’ (Podlesskaya & Xuršudjan 2006), Turkish sey ‘thing’ (borrowed from Arabic, Kabak 2004), Vietnamese cái (a universal classifier for objects);

c. A combination of (a) and (b) – e.g. Chinese zhege ‘this’, nage ‘that’ – a combination of proximal and distal pronouns with a neutral classifier (Zhao & Jurafsky 2005; Hayashi & Yoon 2006 and this volume), Korean combinations of medial (ku) and distal (ce) demonstratives with so called ‘defective nouns’ meaning ‘thing’, ‘place’ etc. (Hayashi & Yoon 2006 and this volume);

d. Lexicalized constructions of the whatchamacallit type with an interrogative word, like how or what, and a naming noun or verb, like name or call – these constructions usually have a slot for a pronominal variable, as in Kuwaiti Arabian isma ‘what-name-his’ (Tsukanova 2006).

Less frequent sources are other classes of deictic words, like Russian emphatic pronoun samyj as a part of the placeholder etot samyj lit. ‘this very’.

In many languages, placeholders have developed into separate lexical items not materially equal to actual (pro)nouns, but their pronominal origin can often be traced, as is reported for so called “noun substitutes” in Algonquian languages (LeSourd 2003); the so called “indefinite substitution word” aji in Udihe (Tungusic, Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001), for the Nganasan (Samoyedic) ditya (related to samyj ‘this’, NGAN; M. Brykina, p.c.); Hungarian ise (possibly, from Finno-Ugric root meaning ‘thing’, MNyÉSz 1979; Moravcsik 2004; V. Goussev, p.c.); Italian coso (a masculine noun developed from the feminine cosa ‘thing’, CPL; Brazilian Portuguese a/a cosa ‘thing’ (originally feminine, but can be used as feminine or masculine copying the gender of the delayed noun, Chamberlain & Harmon 2003; A. Aikhenvald, F. Filho, p.c.); Adyghe mast (N. Sumbatova, Y. Lander, p.c.); Ulcha (Tungusic) xaj (Sumbatova et al. 2005); Manambu (Papua New Guinea) magw (Aikhenvald 2008), etc.

2. Morphology – only nominal or not only nominal?

Placeholders may appear with the same morphological marking as the upcoming target constituent. It is more common for placeholders to substitute nominal constituents, cf. (1), but in some languages, they have wider distribution and can replicate also verbal, adjectival and adverbial morphology, cf. Wouk (2005) for Indonesian; MNyÉSz 1979; Moravcsik (2004) and V. Goussev (personal
Morphology of verbal placeholders – how are verbal affixes attached?

Depending on the morphological characteristics of the language, placeholders can employ available grammatical resources to replicate verbal morphology. At least the following options are registered for verbal placeholders.

3.1 Verbal affixes can be attached directly to a pronominal stem. In addition to examples from Nganasan and Ulcha above, this technique can be illustrated, e.g. by the following example from Udihe, where the placeholder anjı carries an accusative case marker when substituting a noun group in (4a), while in (4b), aspect, mood and personal agreement markers are attached directly to the same stem when substituting a noun group:

(4) Udihe (Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001, by courtesy of I. Nikolaeva)

a. Konz'o-tigi anjı-we xulepte-wë kongodo-ti.

They poured PH [what chamacallit] … ash … into the box.

b. Nanga-da sin-e-we anjı-nde-ze-mi

little-loc you-0-acc PH-sem-subj-1sg

torture-inc-sem-subj-1sg

'I will PH [what chamacallit] … torture you a little.'

3.2 Verbal affixes can be attached to a derived stem. This can be illustrated by the Italian cosare – compare the nominal placeholder cosa (a masculine noun developed from the feminine cosa 'thing') in (5a) and the derived verbal placeholder in (5b).

(5) Italian (CPL)

a. cè-è un cos-à a... a cosare

here-be.pres.3 indef.m PH-m here-be.pres.3 indef.m

coun-à in Ponte d’Arbia.

farmer- in Ponte d’Arbia

'There was a PH [what chamacallit] … there was a farmer in Ponte d’Arbia.'

b. si è mess-à a... a cosare

refl3 be.aux.pres.3 start-past.p.m prep prep PH.inf

come si dice a provocate uno zinar-à a...

how refl3 say.pres.3 prep provoke.inf indef.m Gypsy-m

'[He] started to PH [what chamacallit] … how to say … to provoke a Gypsy.'

Similar evidence comes from Hungarian, where productive denominal affixes are attached to the basic nominal placeholder’s stem izé to derive verbally (izél), attributively (izés), or adverbially (izésen) used placeholders, cf. (MNyÉsz 1979; Moravcsik 2004; V. Goussev, personal communication), as well as from Bulgar, which has tova (proximal demonstrative, neuter) placeholder for definite NPs, takova (demonstrative adjective/pronoun, neuter, ‘such’) for indefinite NPs, and takovam (conjugated as a verb of the a-class) for verbs, cf. (Ra Hauge 1991).

3.3. Another morphological option for a verbal placeholder is to have a semantically bleached verbal root combined with a pronominial stem, as in Georgian (Amiridze 2004 and this volume), or to have fully or partially grammaticalized semantically bleached verb combined (collocated) with an actual nominal placeholder, as in Turkish (Kabak 2004), or Armenian (Podlesskaya & Xuršudjan 2006). This option is demonstrated by the Armenian examples below. In (6a), the nominal morphology (the ablative case marker) is replicated on the placeholder ban when
the target constituent is an NP (Budapeštic’ ‘from Budapest’ in the ablative case), while in (6b), the verbal morphology appears on the auxiliary verb and ‘to do’ (the second person singular conjunctive form) exactly replicating the morphology of the delayed VP (t’ulac’hies – the second person singular conjunctive form of the verb ‘to loosen’) and ban remains in its basic nominative/accusative zero-marked form:

(6) Armenian (Podlesskaya & Xuršudjan 2006)
   a.  u Gayuš-n ēl ēl ēr-ō ban-ic
       and Gayuš-def too that day-def PH-abl
       čel Budapest-ic-
       be.aux.past.3sg come-ff Budapest-abl

   'and that day Gayush too from PH [whatchamacallit] … came from Budapest.’

   b.  p(s)ti gotkates-ov ban an-es
       necessary waist-inst PH do-conj.2sg
       mi k’l(h) t’ulach’n-es.
       one a.bit loosen-conj.2sg

   '[you] need to PH [whatchamacallit] … to loosen [it] a bit at the waist.’

4. Do placeholders show idiosyncratic morphosyntax?

Whatever morphosyntactic technique is employed by placeholders, they often have grammatical idiosyncrasies. Three idiosyncratic cases will be demonstrated below with examples from Russian, Armenian and Georgian.

4.1 Even in languages where there are no regular verbal placeholders, some verbal markers can still be attached to otherwise prototypically nominal placeholders. For instance, in Russian, the distal demonstrative eto only when used as a placeholder can attach verbal Aktionsart prefixes and a negative proclitic:

(7) Russian
   a.  i on pri-eto … pri-bit.
       and he pref-ph pref-nail.pastp

   'And he was pref-ph [whatchamacallit] … nailed [to …].’
   Lit. “PREF-this PREF-nailed.”

   b.  ty ne eto … ne rugaj-sja.
       you neg PH neg swear.imp.2sg-refl

   '[Please] don’t PH [whatchamacallit] … don’t swear.’
   Lit. “don’t = this don’t=swear.”

4.2 Analytic verbal placeholders may show symptoms of development into compounds, especially in languages that have the capacity of creating compound verbs. For example, in Armenian, analytic verbal placeholders allow verbal mood (conditional/predictive) and polarity (negation) prefixes to be moved from the auxiliary verb to the nominal part of the analytic construction. In (8a) and (9a), respectively, verbal markers of mood (the conditional prefix k-) and polarity (the negative prefix č-) sit on their proper place – on the verb. On the contrary, in (8b) and (9b), respectively, these verbal markers are non-trivially attached to ban, i.e. to a nominal part of the analytic placeholder, or, in other words – to the left periphery of the whole complex, while the rest of the verbal morphology keeps being suffixed to the auxiliary, i.e. remains on the right periphery of the complex, hence “framing” the complex as a single unit:

(8) Armenian (Podlesskaya & Xuršudjan 2006)
   a.  yes ban k-an-em k-gam.
       I PH cond-do-pres.1sg cond-come.pres.1sg

   'I PH [whatchamacallit] will do … will come.’

   b.  yes k-ban an-em k-gam.
       I cond-PH do-pres.1sg cond-come.pres.1sg

   'I will PH do [whatchamacallit] … will come.’

(9) Armenian (Podlesskaya & Xuršudjan 2006)
   a.  ban č-an-es č-g-as.
       PH neg-do-conj.pres.2sg neg-come-conj.pres.2sg

   '[Please] PH [whatchamacallit] don’t do … don’t come.’

   b.  č-ban an-es č-g-as.
       neg-ban dejat-conj.pres.2sg neg-priject-conj.pres.2sg

   '[Please] don’t PH [whatchamacallit] … don’t come.’

4.3 Compound verbal placeholders, in their turn, may show idiosyncratic incorporation techniques. For instance, in Georgian, according to (Amiridze 2004 and this volume), a verbal placeholder is based on a pronominal form (the dative form of the distal demonstrative prounim ‘that’) incorporated into a finite ‘do’-verb after a preverb, while “normal” morphology allows incorporated material only in non-finite forms and only positioned before a preverb. Example (10a) below demonstrates the correct use of the placeholder, (10b) shows a correct clause without incorporation, (10c) shows that incorporation into a finite form is ungrammatical, and finally, (10d) shows that incorporation into a non-finite (participial) form is allowed only in front of a preverb and not after it:

(10) Georgian (Amiridze 2004)
   a.  (man) (me) (is) gada-imas-m-i-ka-n.
       (s)he.erg 1.dat 1.nom pv-imas-101.sg-prv-do-s3.sg.aor

   'He PHed it for me from one place/thing into another.'
5. To what extent does a placeholder mirror the grammatical marking of the delayed constituent, if at all?

Languages distinguish between:

a. placeholders that exactly replicate the full grammatical marking of the delayed constituent;
b. placeholders that do not replicate the grammatical marking of the delayed constituent; and
c. placeholders that allow partial replication.

Up till now, we have introduced mainly cases of the type (a), that is, cases where a placeholder fully mirrors the grammatical shaping of its target. But languages may also develop placeholders with a "default" grammatical form that does not replicate the grammatical marking of the delayed constituent. A "default" placeholder is usually (but not always – see below!) the less marked form of the respective pronoun or 'thing'-noun. For example, in Russian, as shown in (11), to substitute for a noun phrase zal 'hall (accusative singular masculine)', one can use a placeholder not only in a form that exactly replicates the substituted morphology – eto (accusative singular masculine), but also in its "default" form – eto (nominative singular neuter):

(11) Russian

Vy nas povedjo-te v eto/eto ...
you us take-pres.2pl to PH.acc.sg.m/PH.nom.sg.n
v trenal'orn-yj zal? to fitness.acc.sg.m hall.acc.sg.m

'Will you take us to PH [whatchamacallit] … to a fitness hall?'

Eto, as a "default" (nominative singular neuter) form, has wide syntactic distribution and can substitute for any type of constituent, including not only NPs, but also VPs and whole clauses, being placed immediately before the delayed constituent – at the absolute beginning of the clause (12a), after a complementizer

   Murman-ERG soul-nom PV-do3.sg-sell-s3.sg.aor
   'Murman sold his soul.'

   Murman-ERG soul-pv-do3.sg-sell-s3.sg.aor
   'Murman sold his soul.'

   soul-pv-sellpast-nom/ PV-soul-sellpast-nom Murman-nom
   'Murman having sold his soul.'

(12) Russian

a. Eto zaxoč-u ja v školu.
   PH.nom.n.sg enter-pres.1.sg lnom into school
   'PH … I am entering the school building.'

b. čto eto zamesto nosa to nego by-li
   that PH.nom.n.sg instead nose-gen by him be-past.pl
   prosto dve dyrk-i.
   just two hole-nom.pl
   'That … PH … instead of his nose, there were just two holes.'

c. ja xoč-u eto ubežat' ot nego.
   lnom want-pres.1.sg PH.nom.n.sg run.away.inf from him
   'I want … PH … to run away from him.'

d. i on eto kakim-to=obrazom
   and he.nom PH.nom.n.sg somehow
   ubežat' v Mongoliju.
   run.away-past.sg.m to Mongolia
   'And he … PH … somehow ran away to Mongolia.'

Similarly, an Armenian placeholder ban may not only exactly replicate nominal morphology, e.g. the ablative suffix in (6a) above, or exactly replicate verbal morphology (in combination with an auxiliary 'do'-verb), as in (6b) above, but it can also be used as a "default" placeholder in its basic nominative/accusative zero-marked form, as in (13) where it substitutes a delayed VP:

(13) Armenian (Podlesskaya & Хuršudjan 2006)

na ban ibrev petkʰ a gar ešor.
he PH likely must be.aux.pres.3 come.conj.pres.3 today

'He … PH … must have come today.'

Sometimes, however, a default placeholder is not the least marked form. For example, in Russian of the XIX century, it was possible to use the genitive (not the nominative!) form of the distal demonstrative togo as a default placeholder. The example below is a citation from one of the classic works of Russian literature, N. Gogol’s "Overcoat". It is a hesitant and truncated direct speech of the novel's protagonist:

(14) Russian (Gogol, III, 150)

ja vot togo … Petrovič … sukno točko v otdom meste
I well PH.gen Petrovič.voc cloth.nom.n.sg only at one.loc spot.loc
nemnego togo nemnego poprotër-t-o-i.
abit PH.gen a.bit fray-past-n.sg-refl

'I … well … PH, … Petrovič, the cloth only has … PH … only has a small frayed spot.'
In languages with no or little morphology, placeholders are, by definition, used in their default form. Below we bring in an example from (Zhao & Jurafsky 2005) illustrating that Chinese uninflectable placeholders zhe ge ‘this’, nage ‘that’ (a combination of proximal and distal pronouns with a neutral classifier), were found to occur before such constituents as clauses (15a); VPs (15b), complement NPs (15c), as well as within an NP between a modifier and a noun head (15d):

(15) Mandarin Chinese  (Zhao & Jurafsky 2005: 180)

a. nage [wo mingtian you shijian].
   PH'I tomorrow have time
   'PH, I have time tomorrow.'

b. wo nage [du-zuo liang bian].
   I PH read-ASP two CL
   'I, PH, read it twice.'

c. [huainian nage [daxue shenghuo]].
   miss PH college life
   '(I) miss, PH, the life in college.'

d. [longzuo de nage [mafan]].
   works NOM PH trouble
   'The work's, PH, trouble.'

Default placeholders often tend to develop into interjective hesitation markers undergoing ‘pragmaticization’, cf. (Hayashi & Yoon 2006 and this volume). Like interjections – and unlike placeholders that mirror the grammatical shaping of their targets – they are no longer integrated into the syntactic structure of the clause. A typical interjectional function acquired by a default placeholder is to signal the beginning of a turn of talk, or, more locally, to signal that the speaker is going to take the floor in a conversation. For example, Russian default placeholder eto same lit. ‘this very’ (the nominative singular neuter form of the proximal demonstrative pronoun plus the nominative singular neuter form of the emphatic pronoun) is often used as an “opening” marker of this kind:

(16) Russian

Eto same, ja vot eto zol'-u skazat.'
PHNOM.N.SG PH-NOM.N.SG LNPOM here what want- PREL.SG SAY.INF
'PH [Look], here is what I want to say …'

Aikhenvald (2008: 573) describes a similar interjective use of the placeholder magw in Manambu: this otherwise uninflectable placeholder can be used “at the beginning of a clause if a speaker is searching for a right way to start … the discourse. … In this function, magw is separated by a pause from the rest of the clause, and is never case-marked.”

In addition to the two polar options, i.e. full replication of the delayed morphology vs. the absence of replication, it is possible for placeholders to partially mirror the grammatical shaping of the delayed constituent. This can be observed in Udihe Example (4b) above, where the placeholder aji-nade-ze-mi ‘PH-SEM-SUBJ-1SG’ copies the semelfactive subject first person singular marking (-nade-ze-mi) of the delayed form kese-li-nade-ze-mi ‘torture-INC-SEM-SUBJ-1SG’ (‘I will torture you’), but does not copy its inchoative marker (-li-).

An interesting case of partial replication of the delayed morphology is demonstrated in the next Russian example, where there are two consecutive placeholders:

(17) Russian

ja zanimaj-u-s'
I.NOM occupied.with-PRES.1SG-REFL PH1-INST.SG.F
kak=e-ë
tipology=INF
how=PH2-ACC.SG.F typology-INST.SG.F
't I am occupied with PH1 PH2 with typology'.
Lit. ‘with this with what[chamacall]it’

The first placeholder eto in (17) is the instrumental singular feminine form of the proximal demonstrative pronoun which exactly replicates the form of the target noun tipologi ‘typology’ (instrumental singular feminine). The second placeholder, however, behaves differently: it is a combination of the interrogative adverb kak ‘how’ and the accusative form of the third person singular feminine pronoun ee’. This combination is a fully lexicalized contraction of the Russian equivalent of the English placeholder whatchamacallit, but with no verb, like ‘call’, inside. This absent verb, however, licenses the accusative case of the pronoun inside the placeholder. So, the number and gender of the pronoun (singular feminine) are licensed by the target noun tipolobi ‘typology’, while the case of the target noun (instrumental) is not reflected by the placeholder.

Another example of partial replication of the substituted grammatical marking is found in Georgian. According to Amiridze (2004 and this volume), verbal placeholders in Georgian obligatorily reflect tense and person affixes of the delayed constituent, while a placeholder without a preverb, like (18a) can replace verbal forms with additional preverbs and agreement prefixes, like those in (18b) and (18c):

(18) Georgian  (Amiridze 2004)

a. imas-0-kv-a.
   imas-D03.SG-PH-S3.SG.AOR
   '(S)he PHed it.'

b. da-m-e-ca.
   PV-101.SG-PRV-fall-S3.SG.AOR
   '(S)he/fall on me.'
Precategorization of the delayed constituent observed in placeholders’ use is similar in nature to a well known differentiation in indefinite/interrogative pronouns which can specify a taxonomic class of their referent, like English who(ever)/what(ever)/where(ever) … that differentiate between animates, inanimates, locations etc. Still closer to placeholder’s use is the use of classifiers in indefinite expressions. Aikhenvald (2000: 54–55), based on (Green 1995: 64–67), describes the use of class prefixes in Gurr-goni, a northern Australian language with a ‘typical’ Australian system of four noun classes. If the semantic domain of a referent is not known, the default Class I ‘masculine’ prefix is used:

$$\text{mu-njatbu} \ n\text{muw}-\text{me-nj}\text{i} \ \text{awurr-ni-}\text{Ø}$$

3CLIIH-whatstit 3AUG.A.3CLIH-L-GET-PRECONT 3AUG.S-BE-PRECONT

‘What’s that CL.III thing (vegetable food) they were getting?’

However, if the semantic domain of a referent is known, the appropriate noun class prefix is used on the indeterminates.

Grammatical categories marked on placeholders may signal different levels of speech planning, e.g. case or tense-aspect-mood marking that appears on a placeholder earlier than on a target constituent shows that grammatical shaping of the target could be completed earlier than the lexeme was chosen, while gender, noun class or transitivity marking that appears on a placeholder shows that a speaker may narrow a paradigmatic class of the target lexeme before the search for the particular word is completed, cf. (Podlesskaya 2006). Even when a placeholder does not replicate the delayed morphology, it may signal the expected syntactic function of the delayed constituent and/or its paradigmatic class. The projected syntactic function of the target can be mirrored by the paradigmatic function of the placeholder. Channell (1994: 161) cites the following corpus example to show that the English placeholder whatstit can appear in an attributive position in anticipation of an adjective:

(19) Like a barbecue with a … you know … a whatstit theme …

Hawaiian theme so everyone comes in grass skirts

Narrowing a paradigmatic class of the target lexeme can be achieved, for example, by choosing one of two or more alternatively possible placeholders. For instance, in English, whatchamacallit and thingamajig usually refer to objects rather than people, while whatsisname and whatsername usually refer to personal names already differentiating gender. (Channel 1994: 160) provides evidence that whatsisname, unlike whatsername, can sometimes refer to objects too. Similar behavior is reported in LeSourd (2003: 148–149) for Maliseet-Passamaquoddy forms lîyê–yêy which, unlike other noun substitutes, show no inflection and can be used in anticipation of inanimate singular nouns, verbs and phrasal expressions of various types, but not in anticipation of animate or plural nouns.

Precategorization of the delayed constituent observed in placeholders’ use is similar in nature to a well known differentiation in indefinite/interrogative pronouns which can specify a taxonomic class of their referent, like English who(ever)/what(ever)/where(ever) … that differentiate between animates, inanimates, locations etc. Still closer to placeholder’s use is the use of classifiers in indefinite expressions. Aikhenvald (2000: 54–55), based on (Green 1995: 64–67), describes the use of class prefixes in Gurr-goni, a northern Australian language with a ‘typical’ Australian system of four noun classes. If the semantic domain of a referent is known, the appropriate noun class prefix is used on the indeterminates -nji ‘what/which/any thing’ and -njatbu ‘whatsitsname’. For example, in (20) the indefinite/interrogative takes the Class III prefix mu- ‘vegetable food’, since the speaker is trying to remember a plant name:


$$\text{mu-njatbu} \ n\text{muw}-\text{me-nj}\text{i} \ \text{awurr-ni-}\text{Ø}$$

3CLIIH-whatstit 3AUG.A.3CLIH-L-GET-PRECONT 3AUG.S-BE-PRECONT

‘What’s that CL.III thing (vegetable food) they were getting?’

This difference in precategorization observed in the use of classifiers closely resembles the difference between default placeholders and placeholders that replicate the full grammatical marking of the delayed constituent.

6. Does the use of placeholders involve the repetition of preceding material?

A placeholder may start not at the leftmost position in its immediate or higher constituent. When placeholders are used with some material coming earlier in the constituent, repeating this material (or, ‘recycling it’, cf. Schegloff 1979) in the target constituent may or may not be required.

Wouk (2005: 247) demonstrates that, for example, in Indonesian, both strategies – recycling and non-recycling are possible:

(22) Indonesian (Wouk 2005: 247)

a. terus mengenai hadiah hadiah-nya itu, apa dari e: e itu, then about gift gift-gen dem what from uh uh PH e Karang Taruna Nana sendiri uh Karang Taruna Nana self

‘Then as for the presents, (were they) what from uh uh PH your [Nana’s] own Karang Taruna (name of an organization)?’

b. dulu saya di ini di jalan Kimia tuh before I in PH in street Kimia dem

‘I used to (live) on PH … on Kimia Street.’
In (22a), the placeholder phrase dari e: e: itu ‘from uh uh that’ is followed directly by the noun phrase which replaces the placeholder itu and the preposition dari ‘from’ is not recycled. In (22b), on the other hand, the locative preposition di occurs both before the placeholder itu and before the noun phrase which then replaces it.

According to Huang & Tanangkingsing (2005), Cebuano also employs both strategies. An example of non-recycling is presented below in (23) where only the root is replaced while the agent focusing prefix nag remains intact:

(23) Cebuano (Huang & Tanangkingsing 2005: 581)

\[
di \ wa =\text{na} =\text{diay} =\text{ka} \text{ didto nag-kuan-tugpo}
\]

DM NEG PF EVID 2SG.NOM there AGF-PH-reside

‘then you’re not PH residing there [in Cebu] anymore?’

Not much is known about the distribution of recycling vs. non-recycling strategies in placeholders’ use cross-linguistically. This distribution is obviously related to basic patterns of recycling observed in speech disfluencies other than placeholders, e.g. in self-repairs. The latter, in their turn, were shown to be sensitive to general morphosyntactic characteristics of the language, including word-order and phrase structure (Fox et al. 1996; Fincke 1998; Wouk 2005; Huang, Tanangkingsing 2005; Fox & Wouk 2007). It is clear, however, that even within a given language, different grammatical patterns differently allow or disallow recycling with placeholders. For example, in Russian, the use of verbal Aktionsart prefixes and a negative proclitic on placeholders requires recycling. In (7), modified below as (24), the non-recycling variants (24a’), (24b’) appear to be ungrammatical:

(24) Russian

a. i on pri-eto ... pri-bit.
   and he PREF-PH PREF-nail.PASTP
   ‘And he was PREF-PH [whatchamacallit] … nailed [to …].’
   Lit. ‘PREF-this PREF-nailed’

b. *on pri-eto-bit
   he PREF-PH-nail.PASTP

On the other hand, the use of nominal prepositions in Russian doesn’t block recycling. For example, in (11), modified below as (25), both inflected and default placeholders may be used with recycling the local preposition v ‘to’ (25b), as well as without recycling it (25b):

(25) Russian

a. Vy nas povedë-te v etot/eto …
   you us take-PRES.2PL to PH.ACC.SG.M/PH.NOM.SG.N
   v trenâţern-yj zalë
   to fitness-ACC.SG.M hall.ACC.SG.M
   ‘Will you take us to PH [whatchamacallit] … to a fitness hall?’

b. Vy nas povedë-te v etot/eto …
   you us take-PRES.2PL to PH.ACC.SG.M/PH.NOM.SG.N
   trenaţern-yj zalë
   fitness-ACC.SG.M hall.ACC.SG.M
   ‘Will you take us to PH [whatchamacallit] … a fitness hall?’

The close relationship between self-repair patterns and patterns of placeholders’ use in a given language shows itself also in the fact that the speaker may use a placeholder as a locus for a repair. This can be illustrated by the following example from Cebuano where the placeholder kuan stands for the delayed verb root taga ‘give’, but at the same time, in the upcoming constituent, the speaker repairs grammatical marking – the patient focus marker on which appeared on the placeholder is substituted for the locative focus marker an:

(26) Cebuano (Huang & Tanangkingsing 2005: 582)

\[
kuan-on =ra =ko =nija
PH-PTF only 1SG.NOM 3SG.GEN
\]
\[
taga-an =ko =nija-g allowance kada buwan.
give-1F 1SG.NOM 3SG.GEN-obl allowance every month
\]

‘He will just PH me … he will just give me my allowance every month.’

At this point, however, to better understand what typological characteristics of individual languages determine patterns of recycling, and what governs the speaker’s choice when both recycling and non-recycling is allowed, a larger number of languages should be examined using a consistent methodology.

7. Other possible functions of placeholders: Hesitation markers, approximators or generic words?

The use of placeholders falls under the broader category of what is called “loose uses” of language (Jucker et al. 2003; Sperber & Wilson 1991: 546), “vague reference”
or "vague categorization" (Channell 1994), or "recognition of deixis", (cf. Enfield 2003). These are lexical and grammatical resources that allow the speaker to refer to objects and events for which the speaker fails to retrieve the exact name, or simply finds the exact name to be unnecessary or inappropriate.

The same words that are used in a language as placeholders per se, that is to temporarily substitute a delayed constituent, may also be used as "vague" or "imprecise" expressions that do not imply any later substitution, but rather suggest an approximate nomination sufficient at the current moment of communication. There are two structural options for an actual placeholder in a given language to function as a vague expression: a placeholder can be used instead of its supposed exact correlate or together with it.

The "instead" option implies that a placeholder is used as a generic expression, i.e. as a cover bleached nomination. According to Jucker et al. (2003: 1749), these expressions convey no referential content in themselves but … instead invite the listener to infer a referent …. The speaker may never have known an appropriate name, or she may not be able to access it at the moment of speaking.

Or, the speaker may have access to an appropriate name but prefers not to use it, e.g. to avoid using an offensive or a taboo word, cf. (Chanell 1994; Hayashi & Yoon 2006). The following example from Adyge demonstrates this use for a placeholder e.g. to avoid using an offensive or a taboo word, cf. (32).

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The "together" option implies that a placeholder is used as a generic expression, i.e. as a cover bleached nomination. According to Jucker et al. (2003: 1749), these expressions convey no referential content in themselves but … instead invite the listener to infer a referent …. The speaker may never have known an appropriate name, or she may not be able to access it at the moment of speaking.

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The actual difference between placeholders per se and vague expressions can often be neutralized. A typical neutralization is observed when the speaker starts searching for an appropriate expression, uses a placeholder to gain some time for searching, but then, after unsuccessful attempts, decides to provide the listener with vague hints instead of a precise nomination. This can be illustrated by the Russian example below, which is an excerpt from a night dream story describing how the protagonist experienced receiving some kind of award in a place that looked like a sea cave. The use of the placeholder *eto* in the masculine singular accusative form suggests that the speaker was searching for a masculine word denoting an award, supposedly *orden* 'an order', but after having failed to find this word, she chooses to use a vague nomination *tipa medali* 'kind of medal', note that *medal* is feminine:

(33) Russian

```
A v drug-oj peičere mne da-l-i
and in another-loc cave-loc me give-past-3pl
eto tipa medal-i,
PH-M.SG.ACC the.sort.of medal-F.SG.GEN
'And in another cave, they gave me PH [whatsisname] kind of medal.'
```

The same phenomenon is observed in the Armenian example below where the speaker uses the default placeholder *en* 'this', then the inflected form of the placeholder *ban*, then, again, *en*, but still cannot provide an exact expression meaning 'instant coffee in bags':

(34) Armenian

```
etenc’h kofe ek’h ayn-um
such coffee be.aux.pres.2pl buy-imppf
'Buying this type of coffee!'
ën ban-er-ic’h verc’r-ek’h.
PH₁ PH₂-PL-ABL take-impp.2pl
PH₁ [well], take from PH₂[whatchamacallit] (lit. ‘from [those] things’),
En paketik-ov vor ka.
PH₁ bag-INST that be.pres.3sg
'PH₁ [well], which is in bags.'
```

The speaker may even truncate a phrase after a placeholder, when he fails to produce the target constituent, as in the following Russian example where the speaker couldn’t find an appropriate way to express the meaning ‘to suffer’, and after using a default placeholder *eto* 'this.N.SG.NOM', simply gave up continuing to produce the phrase in the belief that the listener understood the incomplete portion of discourse from the context:

```
Tak-ojo ne byl-o.
such-N.SG.GEN neg be-past-N.SG
'But nostalgia to the extent that I would PH [whatever] …
There was no such a thing.'
```

And, finally, the close interrelationship between placeholders and vague expressions can be seen in the fact that in many languages placeholders are recruited from those pronouns that can be used cataphorically. One such language – spoken Javanese – is described by Ewing (2005: 81) who explicitly formulates the functional proximity between placeholders and cataphors:

Demonstrative pronouns are a common hesitation filler usually indicating a word search … The use of demonstrative pronouns as hesitation markers can be seen to be related to the cataphoric function … It is as if the speaker fills the grammatical slot – for which a referent or means of expression has not yet come to mind – with a cataphoric demonstrative. The speaker creates a sense of syntactic closure while leaving the semantic content of the slot unfilled, thus indicating the possibility that more is to come and potentially maintaining the floor in order to complete the thought once the appropriate information or expression has come to mind.

8. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed a number of possible parameters for typological variation of placeholders across languages. We have shown that placeholders have primarily a pronominal nature. They are usually actual pronouns or words with evident pronominal origin, ‘thing’ nouns or lexicalized expressions with a pronominal slot.

Placeholders may fully or partially mirror the grammatical shaping of the delayed constituent, which can be nominal as well as verbal, adjectival or adverbial. Depending on the morphological characteristics of the language, placeholders can employ available grammatical resources to replicate verbal morphology. Verbal affixes can be attached directly to a pronominal stem, to a derived stem, to a verbal root compounded with a pronominal stem, or to an auxiliary combined with a nominal PH, often showing idiosyncratic morphosyntax.

Languages distinguish between: (a) placeholders that exactly replicate the full grammatical marking of the delayed constituent; (b) placeholders that allow partial replication, and (c) default placeholders that don’t replicate the grammatical marking of the delayed constituent. The latter often tend to develop into “turn opening” interjective hesitation markers.
Languages, as well as given placeholders within a particular language, may differ in prohibiting, allowing or requiring the material coming earlier in the placeholder’s constituent to be recycled in the target constituent. This distribution is related to basic patterns of recycling observed in speech disfluencies other than those involving placeholders, e.g. in self-repairs.

Finally, we have shown that the same words that are used in a language as placeholders per se, is that temporarily substitute a delayed constituent, may also be used as “vague” or “imprecise” expressions that do not imply any later substitution, but rather suggest an approximate nomination sufficient at the current moment of communication. The use of placeholders as hesitation forms and their use for “approximate naming” can be both viewed as derived from their more general interactional function – to signal the lack of the appropriate expression, no matter whether it has momentarily eluded a speaker or simply doesn’t exist. In both cases, placeholders help the speaker to avoid the necessity of being specific and, according to LeSourd (2003: 161), “to call upon the listener to generalize from the specific meaning … to a larger contextually relevant class”.

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A cross-linguistic exploration of demonstratives in interaction

With particular reference to the context of word-formation trouble

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This study examines uses of demonstratives as filler words in the context where speakers encounter trouble in formulating a word during spontaneous speech production. Focusing on three East Asian languages (Japanese, Korean and Mandarin), we first document the range of forms and functions of demonstratives as fillers observed in naturally-occurring conversations. We then explore theoretical issues that arise from this empirical observation, including the question of why demonstratives, among all linguistic items, are utilized as a tool to deal with word-formation trouble. By investigating the hitherto neglected usages of demonstratives in social interaction, our study contributes both to typological studies of demonstratives and to interactional studies of grammatical phenomena.

Keywords: demonstratives; interaction; word-formation trouble; placeholder; interjective hesitator

1. Introduction

Demonstratives have been a popular object of inquiry in cross-linguistic/typological studies, where varying forms and functions of demonstratives in diverse languages have been investigated (e.g. Weissenborn & Klein 1982; Anderson & Keenan 1985; Himmelmann 1996; Sidnell 1998; Diessel 1999). The present study aims to contribute to this body of research by exploring types of demonstrative usage that have received little attention in the past literature, that is, uses of 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. It has been reported that, in many languages, demonstratives are commonly used by speakers as part of the practice for dealing with