INTRODUCTION

- Filled pauses (FPs) and prolongations (PRs) are markers of disfluency that signal hesitation through vocalization and duration (Ekdulf, 2001; Betz et al., 2017).
- FPs are longer and more frequent than PRs (Ekdulf, 2001).
- In conversation, FPs help interlocutors gain time before answering a question (Lickly, 2001), while PRs signal speaker’s intention to hold floor (Savino & Refice, 2000; Gravano & Hirschberg, 2011).
- Cross-linguistic differences in FPs with respect to preferred type (uh vs. um) and phonetic quality of vowel (Lo, 2019) and in PRs with respect to target segments and position in word (Betz et al., 2017).
- In Italian, FPs more frequent in spontaneous speech than read speech (Magno Caldognetto et al., 1997), and vowel quality of FPs varies by region (Giannini, 2003).
- PRs more frequent than FPs in Italian? (Savino & Refice, 2000)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the characteristics of prolongations and filled pauses in Italian?
- Do Italian speakers produce more prolongations than filled pauses?
- Is there any evidence that filled pauses and prolongations function interactively in Italian, and do they function similarly in different ways?

METHODS

Speech material
- Map Task dialogues from the CLIPS corpus (2 analyzed so far; approximately 27 minutes of dialogue).
- Four native speakers of Roman Italian (2 female, 2 male) matched for gender (F-F, M-M); speakers take turns as instruction giver.

Annotation in Praat
- Annotation of syllable nuclei by script (de Jong & Wemke, 2009) with manual correction.

Analysis of FPs and PRs
- Frequency of occurrence: 1) absolute frequency, for speakers in their two dialogue roles; 2) relative frequency, with respect to dialogue time (ms) and speech produced (100 syllables).
- Characteristics of FPs and PRs: 1) duration (ms); 2) segmental composition; 3) position in turn (initial, medial, final).
- Additional characteristics of PRs: 1) word class; 2) position in word (initial, medial, final).

RESULTS

- PRs more frequent than FPs across speakers.
- FPs and PRs more frequent for instruction givers than followers.
- Most FPs produced by a single speaker.

PRS & WORD CLASS

Word class

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- PRs occur somewhat more frequently in open class words (58%) than closed class words (40%).

Language-specific characteristics of hesitation — Italian patterns differently than other languages (cf. Ekdulf, 2001; Betz et al., 2017):
- Relative frequency of PRs > FPs
- Segments undergoing prolongation (primarily word-final vowels)
- Link to Italian syllable structure (Savino & Refice, 2000; Krämer, 2009)

Interactional functions of FPs and PRs — Possible roles in turn-taking and discourse management:
- Turn holding (Savino & Refice, 2000) and gaining time before responding to a question or continuing to speak (Lickly, 2001).
- Signaling uncertainty (Betz et al., 2019).