Modern Etiquette: Interjections hurt your image

BY MARY MITCHELL
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(Reuters) - Remember the kids who used to pepper their conversations with "uh"? Or the next generation, which started generously sprinkling in "you know"? Canadians have their own seasoning, which they liberally apply to the end of sentences. An "eh" here and there is a dead giveaway.

Now the rage among the 11-to-30 year-old-set is "like". When added to an ample pinch of "omigawd", "totally", and "whatever", what you end up with is a tasteless stew of words. Many of us find ourselves counting the number of times "like" is used in a single sentence, instead of understanding what the conversation was supposed to be all about.

Interjections such as "uh", "you know", and "like" are used to allow the speaker's mouth to catch up with his or her brain, or to make sure the listener has a chance to at least try to attempt to get the meaning of what is being said.

People tend to use "like" more when they are relating something which is of particular interest to them, when the words just seem to want to tumble out. Most people are so inured to such a manner of speaking that they do not even realize how often they are using these interjections.

The problem is that this type of speech will brand the speaker as an airhead or clueless and uneducated. If you speak this way,
people just won't take you seriously. This becomes especially important in job interviews when our verbal skills are being judged for a myriad of bottom-line-based reasons.

Remember that we communicate in three ways: what we say, how we say it, and what we look like as we speak. You may have fascinating anecdotes to relate as you sit in an interview. Yet, if all the "likes" you spew forth outnumber all the other words - or even come close to it - you are in trouble.

What can a person do to expunge such poor parts of speech from their personal usage? Do note that it takes approximately three weeks to create a habit - even longer for behavior to become automatic.

For one thing, try tape recording yourself. Just turn on the recorder and forget about it as you go about your activities. Play it back at day's end. You will be surprised how much you are abusing this four-lettered word. Ask your best friends, trusted colleagues or significant others to correct you every time you use the dreaded word. And do not get angry with them when they stop you short every sentence or two. In the long run, they are doing you a favor.

Try consciously slowing down your talking speed. Wear a rubber band on your wrist and snap it every time you catch yourself using the unwanted word again. Your wrist will be pretty sore at first, but, as William Wordsworth said: "Man must suffer to be wise."

While you are at it, get rid of the equally ignorant-sounding "totally" and "whatever". And, omigawd, persuade everyone you know to do the same, before it is, like, too late!

(Editing by Michael Roddy)