

From lofty aspirations to bored indifference

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Some of us were assigned the "doctors" or "engineers" labels at birth, while others had some freedom in picking their own poisons. Nevertheless, it is understood that most of us had high ambitions when we were kids.

I dreamed of becoming a chemist at some point. There was something fascinating about the cartoonish image of a messy-haired, lab coat-wearing scientist who made colourful chemicals explode comically. Unfortunately, it turns out that chemistry is not for me.

The fact of the matter is, as children we know next to nothing about how the world works. Yes, some people pick a goal at age 10 and somehow stick with it, but let's be real, many of us have never envisioned that we'd be where we are now.

Growing older, our vision of what we're going to be can change, multiple times at that.

Maybe you were told you could be anything you wanted to be when you were a child, but now all of a sudden "Fine Arts" won't pay well, and you're not allowed to study that. So, you think whether Maths or Biology is more abhorrent to you and find yourself in an oversaturated field that has a high chance of leaving you unemployed after graduation. Either way, you probably hate your field and, by extension, yourself.

At some point, you find your dream university changing until it just becomes one you can realistically get into. Perhaps at one point the concept of a "dream university" has faded away until it's nothing but a fever dream.

You watch your grades decline until you're toeing on dangerous territory. Your exam preparation has gone from revising twice to "God, please help me pass and I'll straighten up next semester."

Somehow, you make it through. Next semester around though, your exam strategy is, once again, praying or crying.

You tell yourself that you're not the most ambitious person around, knowing that it's only a feeble attempt at trying to console yourself.

The grand ambitions that once made you feel like you could conquer the world are nowhere to be found. That's fine though because you only care about it once every couple of years.

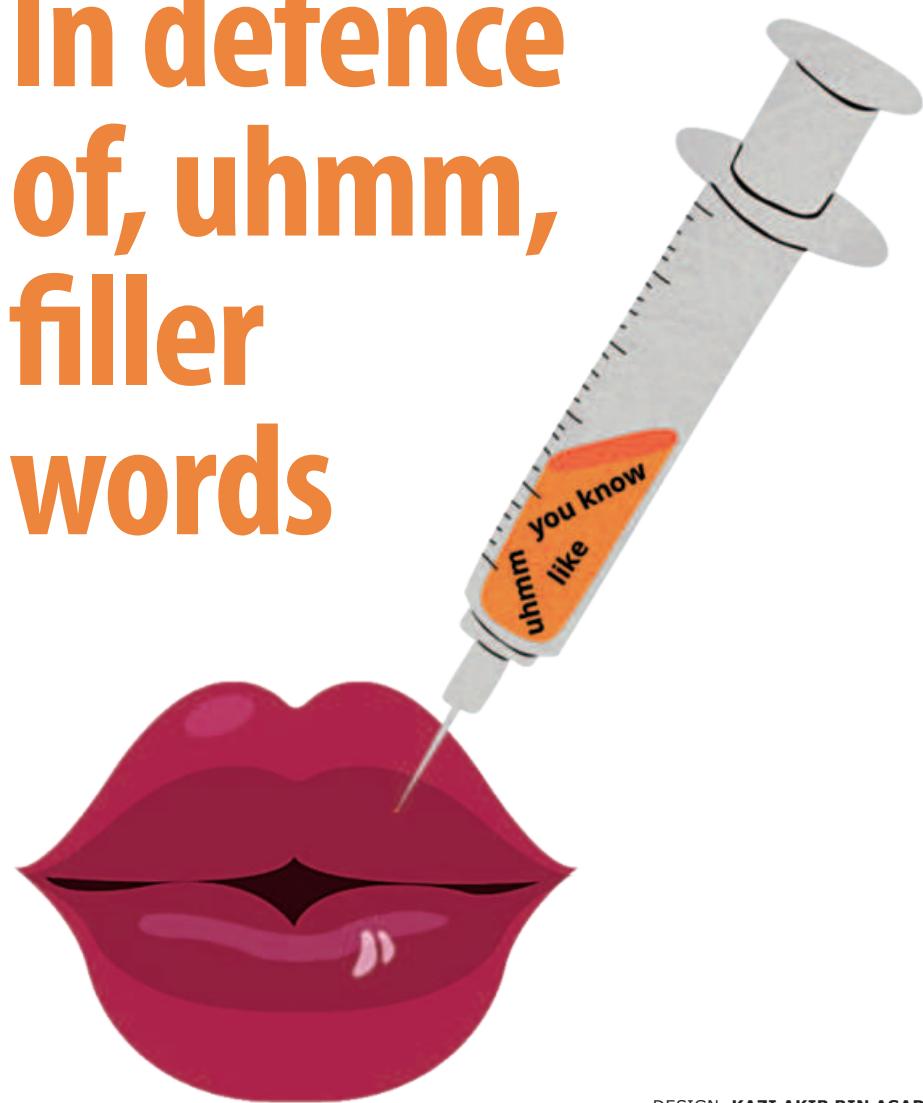
At the end of the day, however, we're not just defined by our achievements. We're humans, and we have much to offer the world than tired minds and broken dreams. But we'll get to that after the exam season ends.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is trying her best to gain the affection of the cats on her campus. Help her win them over at fb.com/zabintazrin.nashita



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

In defence of, uhmm, filler words



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

RAYA MEHNAZ

"So, like, I asked him, you know, to pass me the water bottle," you overhear a voice say.

"But Sarah, he was just, like, so rude to me," the person's friend jumps in.

Subconsciously or not, you feel yourself judging the speakers. You can't help but consider them, who were so easy with the "likes" or "you knows" in a conversation, just a tad bit undignified.

Growing up, between scribbling essays about the "importance of learning English" and learning concepts from English for Today, we somehow internalised the belief that fluency in English equates to actual proficiency in the language. In that internal dialogue, there was rarely any excuse for the use of filler words.

In English, filler words are the sounds we use in between words such as "uhmm", "like", "you know," which individually might not be meaningless, but in the sentence's context usually is. Ultimately, filler words, alternatively known as crutch words, are words we use in conversations in place of a pause. The likes of these words are also used to stress or de-stress the meaning of the sentence.

Despite its harmless use in our everyday vernacular, people have an unnatural hatred for these words. After all, there is no chapter on filler words in Chowdhury & Hossain's Advanced Learner's Communicative English, is there?

As we are venturing out into the world, we are experiencing English in new avenues. The medium of our social interactions often largely happens in

English. From apps we use to job interviews to public speaking, there has been a greater emphasis in our society on proficiency in English.

In this greater push for linguistic efficiency, filler words are deemed almost unseemly in what we perceive to be a professional language. In that perception, using filler words could essentially ruin our legitimacy as a proper English speaker.

However, this is where our tendency to revert to Western rhetoric about English proficiency comes to play. Not to discredit English and its many varying applications in our lives, but the fact remains – the outcry that we face when we cannot use English in its proper fluency is something that needs to be looked into thoroughly.

It needs to be understood if this disdain is coming from a genuine desire to excel at a language or is it coming from some sort of cultural guilt that has been conditioned into us every time we fumble over English?

Euphonious they may not be, but filler words are not incomprehensible. Adding a few "likes" here and a few "uhmms" there should not discredit a speaker entirely. Nor should it be undignified to use it in academic settings or presentations, despite many warnings in the contrary.

In a way, aren't we all trying to unlearn years of conditioning that "English makes us sound smart"? So why not start believing in the idea that filler words are not our enemy?

Find Raya at fb.com/raya.mehnaz