

Transcript for linguistics vlog

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Hello and welcome to my first vlog! My name is Becca Tuck and I'm a senior at Kennesaw State University majoring in Technical Communication. This vlog was created for an assignment in my Grammar for Professional Communicators class and today I'll be analyzing the linguistic topics of up-talk and vocal fry and why women are linguistic innovators. I've put the links to my sources in the captions section so feel free to check them out for further reading.

As linguistic innovators, it is my belief that women do lead the way or as I like to say, 'make the rules.' Exactly why this is the case, is not a hard and fast rule. Perhaps looking at how certain terms, expressions, and voice intonations have permeated society will lend credence to why these practices by women have been deemed 'acceptable.'

Let's first look at some of the terms and their meaning:

1. **up-talk** – rising intonation at the end of a sentence
2. **vocal fry** – a creaky or rattled voice produced by compressing the vocal chords reducing airflow through the larynx and the frequency of vibrations
3. **terms** such as 'like,' 'you know,' 'I know, right'

All of the terms/intonations can be heard more from females and more precisely, the young and upwardly mobile set.

[An interview from 2011](#) with the actress Zooey Deschanel, displays most of the above linguistic practices. You can hear her use of the word 'like' numerous times, up-talk is very frequent throughout, and vocal fry creeps into her sentences.

Gabriel Arana talks about the research in a vocal fry article in [The Atlantic](#). If we look at the practice of how linguists conduct research on a new language, we can start with their use of the NORM group. NORM stands for a non-mobile, older, rural, male. Typically, linguistically conservative, this NORM group serves as a model of where the language has been. Now, to my point, if we want to see where language is going—to whom do we look? It is to the young, urban, upwardly mobile woman. One suggestion has been that if someone does find the linguistic practice of vocal fry as detestable, it may in fact be more of how they feel about young women as opposed to the actual sound of the 'vocal fry.'

Vocal frying is not seen as a positive trait to some people in society. Ask a member of a NORM group what they think about the use of the terms/intonations mentioned above and you might get a reaction such as 'throwing their hands in the air' as if the member is giving up on the whole of society. Yet, if you ask the question why the member of the NORM group displays disapproval and basically denounce the language, you may not get a definitive response. The best that the member might come up with is it 'just sounds wrong.' One study showed vocal frying is seen so negatively by some that it may actually impact a female's job prospect. People exhibiting vocal frying during the study were seen as, "less competent, less educated, less trustworthy, less attractive, and less hire able." However, the study acknowledges that

age plays a factor in the perception of vocal frying. The negative perception of vocal frying was “muted” among the younger listeners, meaning they viewed vocal frying more favorably than older listeners who heard vocal frying.

I was listening to a recent episode of This American Life, [If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say, SAY IT IN ALL CAPS](#), and they have an 8 ½ minute story dedicated to this phenomenon of vocal fry. Ira Glass, the producer of TAL, talks about listener emails and their complaints about several of the TAL reporters using vocal fry and how annoying and irritating it is to listeners. I have to admit – I didn't notice the vocal fry in some of my favorite reporters (Chana Joffe-Walt, Alix Spiegel) but maybe you will. Definitely go listen to it if you have a chance.

Up-talk, vocal fry and 'like' are not unsophisticated language and have no bearing on the intelligence of the user of such expressions. Any thoughts of inferiority are not based on scientific evidence, rather they are based on various prejudices about the speakers. In this topic, the prejudices are mostly likely based on the speakers' age (young) and gender (female). Language discrimination has been around for a long time, but it is not acceptable. Perhaps the prejudices and discrimination surrounding this type of talk would not exist if the NORMs had been the innovators. When you look down through the centuries as to how language has evolved, you can see that change is inevitable. What was once the standard, such as double negatives in English, is now seen as unacceptable. The perception of a linguistic trait can change easily, and women are at the forefront of making this change happen. At this point, it can be said that the NORMs may want to get on board with the changes. Female innovation has become a reliable source of linguistic change, and with change comes greater ability to express oneself. These linguistic characteristics can help users distinguish their message more effectively. Vocal frying, up talk, and modern expressions give people a new way to communicate what they mean, which is always a good thing.

As we wrap up this week's segment, I like to think of the aforementioned language practices as examples as to how our language has evolved and continues to evolve. It is freedom to me in looking at the flexibility we have in expressing ourselves. As I conclude, I think it is appropriate to say 'thank you' to these young, upwardly mobile women for giving us a more expressive and expansive vocabulary.

Articles cited:

[Arana: Good sociolinguistic conclusion despite questionable examples](#)

[They're, Like, Way Ahead of the Linguistic Currve](#)

[Creaky Voice: Yet Another Example of Young Women's Linguistic Ingenuity](#)

[U R Soooo Going to Tweet Like a Girl Soon](#)

This American Life podcast episode 545: [If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say, SAY IT IN ALL CAPS](#)

Anderson, Rindy C., et al. "Vocal Fry May Undermine The Success Of Young Women In The Labor Market." *Plos ONE* 9.5 (2014): 1-8. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.