

It's, like, a really interesting study

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Teenage girls' remarks, such as "She's so not cool," may be dismissed as typical teen talk, but scientists say girls affect the way adolescents speak.

"One of the most pervasive findings of sociolinguistics is that when you have language changing, women tend to lead the change," said University of Toronto linguistics professor Sah Tagliamonte. "They pick up the new form and they carry it forward probably about a generation ahead of the guys."

Tagliamonte was interested in determining why teens, particularly girls, frequently use "like" and "just" during conversations. So, four undergraduate student researchers, under Tagliamonte's supervision, interviewed 29 members of their own families and friends.

The interviewees ranged in age from 10 to 19 years and came from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Tagliamonte found as children age, their patterns of speech change. When girls reach adolescence, the words "like" and "just" are used more frequently than boys. Fifteen- and 16-year-old females use "like" the most frequently of all age groups, but say it less than males once they enter a university.

The research appears online in the Journal of Pragmatics.

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