

Use of vocal fry may damage professional image of young employees

February 26 2013, by Megan Saunders



K-State experts offer advice on remaining professional in how you speak. Credit: AmandaBreann via photopincc

The use of one vocal habit could put some college students at a disadvantage when it comes to presenting a professional image, according to experts at Kansas State University.

Linda Hoag, professor of communication sciences and disorders, said vocal fry—also known as glottal fry or the pulse register—is one of the three vocal registers used by humans. Vocal fry is generally associated with the gravelly sound sometimes heard at the end of a spoken sentence.

Find an exaggerated example at bit.ly/XQuPT8 .

When the voice slips into vocal fry, Hoag said it is more difficult to sound energetic or animated.

"It's more likely to happen when you're low on breath," said Hoag. "A speaker may start out the sentence with a smooth voice, then drift into vocal fry on the final words. It doesn't take much air power to create vocal fry."

When speaking normally or singing, the modal register is generally used. The loft register is used when speaking in a high, falsetto voice. When vocal fry takes place, the [vocal folds](#) are relaxed and vibrating at a low rate in a syncopated rhythm.

"The science behind it is incomplete," Hoag said. "As of now, we are not aware of any structural or [physiological differences](#) that predispose women to vocal fry."

Hoag said vocal fry could be concerning for individuals who use their voices professionally, such as speech-language pathologists.

Another Kansas State University expert said habits such as vocal fry could affect professionals in a variety of careers.

Olivia Law-DelRosso, director of the College of Business Administration's Professional Advantage program, a professional development program for business students, said using vocal fry or words such as "like" or "um" can be irritating to older generations and may make the individual sound unprofessional.

"Vocal fry is considered trendy, and that's not something that generally appeals to older generations or certain clients," Law-DelRosso said.

"You want to appear professional, and being thought of as trendy does not help. As far as speaking patterns, it's better to be the standard. Stand out with your ideas and innovations, not your speech."

Law-DelRosso suggested young professionals use what is known as senior presence, which is displaying a presence of maturity, professionalism and experience. Part of that, she said, is being conscious of speech patterns.

"Match the tone and quickness of your voice to the person you're talking to, as well as the volume," she said. "Women sometimes speak too softly, which does not project confidence. Also, young people shouldn't be afraid to speak up or give their opinions. You're in the conversation because your opinion is valued; don't distract from your ideas with your speech patterns."

Fortunately, Hoag said it is possible to keep from slipping into vocal fry when speaking by adjusting your air intake before speaking.

"Taking in a bit more air when you are preparing to speak may help," she said. "End your utterance before your voice starts to sound rough. It may require some initial attention to adjust the amount of air you inhale to match the length of your utterance."

Hoag add that if this doesn't fix the problem, an individual should consider seeing an ear, nose and throat specialist. It may be a health issue, such as allergies, or another source of irritation.

Provided by Kansas State University

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