

Soundalike sweethearts

By Daily Mail Reporter

- 1 If you want to know whether your relationship will last, don't listen to what your partner says but pay very close attention to how he or she says it. The more your other half copies your slang and speech patterns, the more psychologically connected you are. Well-matched couples mimic each other's language during conversations, a study has found. And couples are most likely to perform this "language style matching", or LSM, during happier phases of their relationship, according to American researchers. "Because style matching is automatic, it serves as a window into people's close relationships with others," said Molly Ireland, who helped lead the study.
- 2 Researchers started off studying the language used by almost 2,000 university students as they responded to class assignments written in very different language styles. If the essay question was asked in a dry, confusing way, the students answered in a similarly complex, serious style. But if it was posed in a casual, familiar manner, the students punctuated their answers with slang and terms such as "like" and "kinda".
- 3 To see how this applied to close personal relationships, the researchers then analysed the correspondence of famous writers – such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, who wrote to each other almost weekly over a seven-year period as their careers were developing. By analysing the LSM in their letters, the researchers were able to 4 the two men's tempestuous relationship – from their early days of joint admiration to their final days of mutual contempt.
- 4 Next, the researchers extended the study to romantic relationships by assessing the LSM of two famous couples – Victorian poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, and 20th century poets Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. The study revealed that major changes in each couple's marriage were mapped out in the poetry. Mrs Ireland said: "Style words in the spouses' poems were more similar during happier periods of their relationships, and less synchronised toward each relationship's end." The varying levels of LSM between the two couples were also revealing – as even at the happiest stage of their marriage, Plath and Hughes were less in sync than the historically more harmonious Brownings were at their lowest point.
- 5 The researchers are now investigating whether language style matching has the potential to quickly and easily reveal whether any given pair – business rivals or romantic partners – are on the same page psychologically, and what this means for their future together.



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