

# lol i didn't mean it!

## LOL AS A MARKER OF ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE

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'Lol' is the most common acronym in many text messaging corpora<sup>1,2</sup>, and signifies more than 'laughing out loud'. Some suggest it does emotional work for the texter, adding a positive tone<sup>3,4</sup>, others say it is a phatic particle, helping to negotiate discourse<sup>5,6,7</sup>, and still others say it signals empathy<sup>7</sup>. Everyone agrees (and Ex. 1 & 2 illustrate) that it does more than indicate laughter.

### Example 1 (BYTs Corpus)

It's okay if you don't know how to cook lol a lot of people don't know how to cook

### Example 2 (BYTs Corpus)

Si y aunque tambien estaba enferma del estomago lol  
Yes, and I am a little sick to my stomach lol

This project seeks to provide an explanation for 'lol' that captures all of its uses and answers the question, **what does 'lol' mean?**

## THE CORPUS

The Bilingual Youth Texts (BYTs) Corpus<sup>2</sup> contains 45,597 text messages collected from 15 Spanish/English bilinguals in New York City age 18-21. Participants donated their saved message histories.

14% of all messages include 'lol'.

'lol' usually only occurs once per message; the 5 instances where it appears twice are all multi-clausal, and 'lol' appears at clause boundaries.

Messages were anonymized, cleaned, identified by language, and separated into 2 groups:

- ~13,000 from 13 individuals (Primary Set)
- ~31,000 from 2 individuals (Lovers Set)

## SPEECH ACT THEORY

Utterances can perform actions on the world and social relationships<sup>8,9</sup>. Each utterance (or message) can have a:

- **Locutionary act** – the literal meaning of the words and act of conveying the utterance itself
- **Illocutionary act** – the intended effect of the utterance, or what the speaker intends for the utterance to do (i.e., promise, request, congratulate, etc.).
- **Perlocutionary act** – what happens to the listener or in the world as a result of the utterance (i.e., persuade, inspire, etc.).

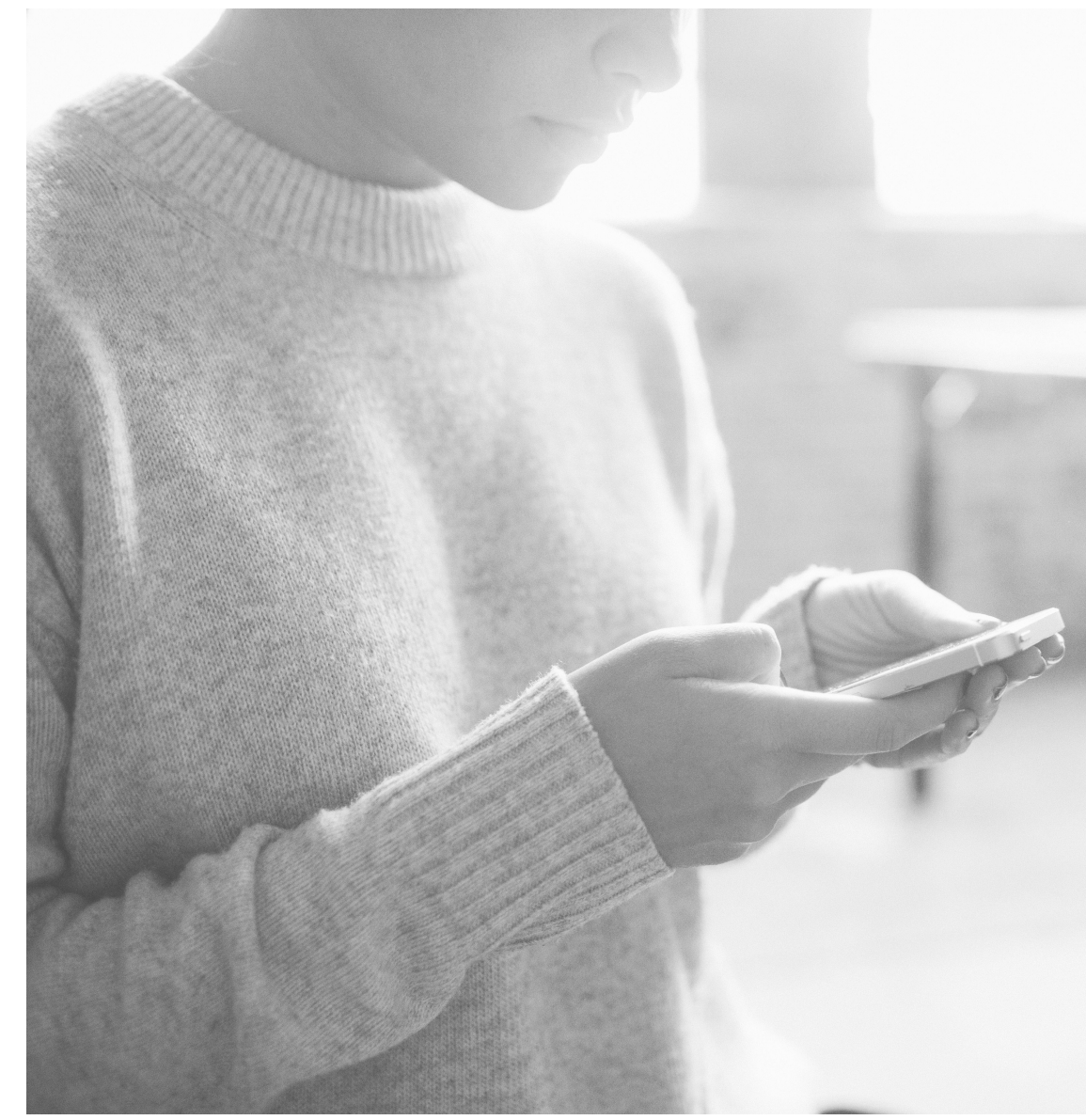
The meaning driving the illocutionary act (as opposed to the action itself) is the **Illocutionary Force**<sup>10</sup>.

Constructing one illocutionary act through the formation of another is an **Indirect Speech Act**<sup>9</sup> (i.e., asking a question to make a request, etc.)

**Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices**<sup>11</sup> are cues to alert the receiver to the illocutionary force of the utterance.

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### Example 3 (Flirting)

Te gusta vestirte de blanco heel  
You like to wear white heel

Si 😊  
Yes 😊

Lol se te ve bien igual el negro y el rojo :) una percha

Lol you look good in both the white and the red :) a hanger

### Example 4 (Flirting)

What you guys doing?

Hablando lol

About me I bet. 😊

Lol un poco

### Example 5 (Requesting Empathy)

Lol estoy haciendo un ensayo :(

Me alegre <3  
I'm happy <3

Lol I'm writing an essay :(

### Example 6 (Hedging Confrontation)

It's not funny babe

😡😡😡  
I know

Lol you always send me kisses to get out of trouble.

I'm on to you 😊

### Example 7 (Expressing Love)

Good night Amor 🥰😘💕🌙🌠 sweet dreams

You too 💕

Thank u 🥰😘 and go to sleep 🌙🌠🌠🌠🌠🌠

### Example 8 (Expressing Love)

I love you too 🥰💕🌹👩🏻👦👧

### Example 9 (Direct Statement)

😞😞😞

You hurt me so much in our relationship. I felt inseguro everyday because of you. I just want to feel loved

### Example 10 (Phatic Communion)

Hey 🥰🌹

Klk

Que lo que (*what's up*)

Wyd

Nothing hbu

What you doing

Nothing how 'bout you

### Example 11 (Direct Question)

Can you tell me your schedule so I know when to text you

## LOVERS

### Example 12 (Indirect Speech Act: Flirting through questioning)

So you watch Telemundo lol

At the barbershop the guys love to watch caso cerrado

### Example 13 (Direct Speech Act: Questioning)

Mi tia estaba en el Army & su esposo sigue en el Army todavia

So you like it there better than here?

Nooooo

My aunt was in the Army and her husband was and still is in the Army

## ANALYSIS

Each message with 'lol' and a selection of messages without were tagged for their discourse function:

- Flirting
- Empathizing
- Requesting
- Emotional expression
- Phatic communion
- Etc.

Hypotheses were developed based on analysis of the Primary Set and these hypotheses were applied to the Lovers Set.

In the Lovers Set, messages with 'lol' were compared to messages with a similar function but without 'lol'.

## RESULTS

'lol' only occurs in messages conveying an Indirect Speech Act, that is, the literal meaning of the message and the intended function (illocutionary act) are not directly aligned. It occurs in instances of:

- Flirting (Ex. 3 & 4)
- Giving or receiving empathy (Ex. 5)
- Hedging a statement or request (Ex. 6)

'lol' is absent in messages where the message is an assertion and meant to be interpreted literally:

- Expressing love (Ex. 7 & 8)
- Direct statements (Ex. 9)
- Phatic Communion (Ex. 10)
- Direct Questions (Ex. 11)

## CONCLUSIONS

'lol' helps construct Indirect Speech Acts by indicating that the illocutionary force of the message differs from the literal meaning.

In a texted context, there are no aural or physical cues to help convey implied meaning (as there may be in face-to-face or spoken contexts). Therefore, to make indirect speech acts, texters have adapted the linguistic tools available to the affordances and constraints of the medium (i.e., its creative, informal, and visual nature, the absence of aural cues, etc.).

As a result, 'lol' has evolved from indicating laughter to serve as an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device in messages intended to function as Indirect Speech Acts. It suggests that in addition to the literal meaning of the message, the receiver should interpret the message in the social context it was sent (a.k.a. 'read between the lines').

This helps explain why 'lol' is so widespread in text messaging as it facilitates indirect communication, an important social function<sup>12</sup>. 'lol' is one of many tools interlocutors use to convey pragmatic meaning when texting.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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