**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\(^2\), and signifies more than 'laughing out loud'. Some suggest it does emotional work for the writer, adding a positive tone\(^3\); others say it is a phatic particle, helping to negotiate discourse\(^1\), and still others say it signals empathy\(^5\). 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 también estás enferma del estómago 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\(^6\) contains 45,397 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 contain 'lol'. 'lol' usually only occurs once per message, the 3 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\(^8\). 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**\(^9\). Constructing one illocutionary act through the formation of another is an **Indirect Speech Act**\(^7\) (i.e., asking a question to make a request, etc.)

**Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices**\(^10\) are cues to alert the receiver to the illocutionary force of the utterance.

**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:

- Expressive 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 adopted the linguistic tools available to the affords 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\(^9\). 'lol' is one of many tools interlocutors use to convey pragmatic meaning when texting.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**
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**REFERENCES**