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Digital Culture

OMG: IM Slang Is Invading Everyday English

by [Neda Ulaby](#)



RUOK? That means "Are you okay" in IM parlance, BYKT. (But you knew that.)

GWTL

Get with the Lingo! Okay, we made that one up. But these other IM terms are real.

- BBL: Be Back Later
- BRB: Be Right Back
- IMHO: In My Humble Opinion
- JK: Just Kidding
- LOL: Laughing Out Loud
- LYLAS: Love You Like a Sister
- NP: No Problem
- OMG: Oh My God
- OTP : On the Phone
- ROFL: Rolling on Floor Laughing
- TTFN: Ta-Ta for Now
- TTYL: Talk to You Later
- YW: You're Welcome

You're Just Getting Started

Nope, it's not an eye chart, it's more IM acronyms.

- [NetLingo](#)

[Weekend Edition Saturday](#), February 18, 2006 · If you use instant messaging on your computer, you may be familiar with the acronym LOL (Laughing Out Loud). But what about BRB, TTYL or ROFL? Especially among teenagers, you're just as likely to encounter IM-speak in the real world as you are on your desktop.

Instant Messaging (IM) technology was popularized by AOL during its rocketing rise in the 1990s. Now, it has spread to other systems such as Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger and Google Talk.

The phenomenon of written IM slang crossing over into speech is manna for linguists. Professor David Crystal, who has written extensively on language and the Internet, observes: "I see a brand new variety of language evolving, invented really by young people... within five years! It's extraordinary."

Some acronyms meant to stand as shorthand for one phrase morph into separate words: ROTFL (Rolling on the Floor Laughing) has become ROFL, which has become "rawfl," an often droll spoken response to an attempt to be funny.

Teens admit that some purists might read the advent of IM slang into speech as a negative development. But linguistics professor Crystal thinks it is an enhancement. Instant message expressions have done more than just added to constructions of the English language and the roughly 200,000 words in common use today. "They extend the range of the language, the expressiveness... the richness of the language," he says.