

Text me if :) makes you LOL or pull out your hair - JK

By Joe Amarante 06/29/2008

The 411 on shorthand?

It's a quick churn in modern society.

I'm in my 50s and I would not consider using something nutty like "CYL" for "see you later" or "GGP" for "gotta go pee."

I can barely keep up with my colleague Pat Ferrucci, who is in his late 20s and uses terms like "prog" (for some kind of music) or IPA (India Pale Ale, his favorite brew) or "embedded code" (for something that allows us to post a video on our blogs).

But teens are using a myriad of terms that even youthful Pat wouldn't consider using - acronyms, mostly, born out of the instant-messaging and text-messaging movements in the digital revolution.

"LOL" is a pet peeve of mine, since I don't think anyone really laughs out loud when they're messaging a mile a minute. Or 50 messages a minute, to be more precise.

So does Pat use LOL or GTG (got to go)?

"Oh, God, no," says Pat. "I would rather just sit there and type."

He does text-message, since it is a tool for communicating that suits all but the most outgoing or verbally chatty. "I just think it's functional, so I can ask a friend a question or coordinate something when I have nothing else to say to them," Pat says.

For a while, people were using those little punctuation icons, such as :) and (:, which also annoy the heck out of me since I'm not an icon person. But that was mostly online.

Then came mobile text messaging, which puts a premium on fewer characters since you do it all with your thumbs. ("I'm all thumbs" used to be an insult; now it means "I can communicate while in chemistry class without opening my mouth.")

Since you generally can't see the person you're texting, acronyms and other shorthand fulfill a need to signal the other person that you know they said something funny. Otherwise, you're left with a version of the AT&T commercial, where the guy makes a joke with his prospective father-in-law and then doesn't hear anything back.

Yikes. Painful pause. Nothing.

I've noticed newly annoying versions of LOL, such as LMAO (laughing my ass off), LMHO (laughing my head off), LMSO (laughing my socks off) and FOMCL (falling off my chair laughing). Not to mention WMPL (wet my pants laughing). But again, did the wetting actually happen? I would quibble with this one.

For a list of terms, I consulted the Web site netlingo.com, where there's many quite clever shorthand terms - some of them quite crude, as teens are wont to be. (Whoa, there's some oldster language, right there.)

Several terms are all about texters' preternatural need to keep track of each other's status in the ongoing conversation of life: "BBIAW" is be back in a while, "BRB" is be right back, "B4N" is bye for now, "GFN" is gone for now and "GFTD" is gone for the day.

I texted the most prodigious texter in my house, Linda, for the shorthand she uses. Here's what she texted back: "Hahaha umm i guess the common ones are lol, jk, 2 instead of to, l8r for later, ldk for i dont know and ldk any more my friends r cool and spell things out."

Allow me to translate that: She's amused that I'm writing about this topic. She's seen a lot of "LOL" and "JK" for just kidding. She uses the numeral 2 instead of "to" and 8 for words such as "later." Punctuation isn't as readily available, she implies, so it's much easier to say "IDK" for I don't know. Also: Her friends don't use too many of these shortcuts.

If you do use a lot of these terms, you'll need transition phrases such as "AAR8" (at any rate), "AYK" (as you know) and "BTW" (by the way).

When you're feeling negative, you'll need these: "G4N" (good for nothing), "IBTD" (I beg to differ) "WIM" (woe is me) and "YM" (your mother).

Some of the posts are just nerdy, which makes them even more amusing. "RTFM" is read the (flipping) manual, "PEBCAC" is problems exist between chair and computer and "MUBAR" is messed up beyond all recognition. Then there's one I would consider a substitute for LOL: ILICISCOMB, or "I laughed, I cried, I spilled coffee on my keyboard."

Many others are inappropriate for anyone under 21 (or 81), which is the big problem with people spending so much time texting that they need a lot of shorthand. If you need so much code instead of regular language, you may be doing something your loved ones consider very wrong. In that case, you should probably leave the keyboard or phone alone and GAL: Get a life.

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