



Txtng: The Gr8 Db8

David Crystal

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Text messaging has spread like wildfire. Indeed texting is so widespread that many parents, teachers, and media pundits have been outspoken in their criticism of it. Does texting spell the end of western civilization? In this humorous, level-headed and insightful book, David Crystal argues that the panic over texting is misplaced. Crystal, a world renowned linguist and prolific author on the uses and abuses of English, here looks at every aspect of the phenomenon of text-messaging and considers its effects on literacy, language, and society. He explains how texting began, how it works, who uses it, and how much it is used, and he shows how to interpret the mixture of pictograms, logograms, abbreviations, symbols, and wordplay typically used in texting. He finds that the texting system of conveying sounds and concepts goes back a long way--to the very origins of writing. And far from hindering children's literacy, texting turns out to help it. Illustrated with original art by Ed MacLachlan, a popular cartoonist whose work has appeared in Punch, Private Eye, New Statesman, and many other publications, *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* is entertaining and instructive--reassuring for worried parents and teachers, illuminating for teenagers, and fascinating for everyone interested in what's currently happening to language and communication.

Txtng: The Gr8 Db8 Details

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From Reader Review Txtng: The Gr8 Db8 for online ebook

Sarah says

Written in 2008 so slightly out of date. But well written and interesting.

Grace says

I'm not sure what the "the gr8 db8" is. Author David Crystal sets out to dispel media reports that texting promotes the butchering of the English language and is producing teens and young adults who cannot string a coherent sentence together without the use of "textisms." However, these media reports that created this cultural generalization that texters are illiterate vandals are nothing but sensationalized reporting based on a random rumor of a student using texting abbreviations in an essay for school. The student and his/her essay are no where to be found so this story cannot be corroborated. If the information in these reports cannot be supported by evidence, I don't see how you can debate it.

Setting that aside, this book is a wealth of information regarding this instant communication that has pervaded into our culture - at all age levels. Analyzing text messages helped prosecutors by disproving an alibi, which put a killer in prison. The UK has text poetry competitions. A teenager won \$25,000 in a texting competition in New York City. Besides these really cool, yet random factoids, David Crystal spends a great deal of time explaining all of the aspects of language found in texting - rebuses, initialisms, igograms, etc. - all of which have been a standard part of people embracing and utilizing language for hundreds of years. He also put a great deal of effort into researching the global texting phenomenon and even compiled textisms from 11 other languages.

The most important things I took away from this book are:

1. Teenage texters are not ruining the English language nor are they turning into illiterate vandals with thumb problems.
 2. Texting is revolutionizing communication, just as the printing press, telephone, television, Internet, and cell phones did before it.
-

Amy says

Back in 1996 when internet chatrooms were fairly new, an asocial geek in my honors English class wrote a paper on the validity of an exciting new type of language that was cropping up in chatrooms where people were regularly using abbreviated phrases like LOL (laugh out loud), ROFL (rolling on floor laughing), and TTFN (ta ta for now). Our antiquated teacher didn't seem to know enough about what the guy was talking about to pass any judgement on it one way or the other. Half the class didn't even own a computer. And I wasn't going to admit to spending time in chat rooms.

Since then, this type of abbreviated language has made its way to text messaging on cell phones in an even larger way because of the 180-character text limitations of sending text messages via SMS (short messaging service). When you're limited to only 180 characters and you're being charged by the message, you often

have to find creative ways to use the limited typing space available to you.

Many people find the abbreviated writing of text messages to be foreboding of a generation that will become unable to use English properly. Others find the abbreviations used in text messaging to be a bastardization and degradation of the language.

In the book *Txting: The Gr8 Db8*, linguist David Crystal attempts to show that abbreviations in language is nothing new, that the abbreviated language of text messages is creative word play, that texters know when to use proper English, and that our youngsters around the world are not taking our languages to hell in a hand basket by their alternate spellings in text messages.

The author starts out by showcasing several award-winning poems that were confined to the 180-character limitation of a text message. My very favorite was this one:

14: a txt msg pom. (14: a text message poem)
his is r bunsn brnr bl%, (his eyes are bunsen burner blue,)
his hair lyk fe filings (his hair like iron filings)
W/ac/dc going thru. (with electricity going through.)
I sit by him in kemistry, (I sit by him in chemistry,)
it splits my @oms (it splits my atoms)
wen he :-s @ me. (when he smiles at me.)

This is clearly not a poem written by someone who doesn't know how to use the language properly. In fact, there has even been a recent phenomenon in many Asian countries of entire books being written in installments by text messaging. The language is very specific and minimalist.

The author gives many examples of how language is already full of abbreviations and plays on words. Text messaging is certainly not the first place we've seen such language usage. Previous text language and text-like language usages include:

- * THE REBUS -- This is a play on words where pictures, numbers, and letters are combined to form phrases: 2 [picture of bee:] [picture of oar:] not 2 [picture of bee:] = to be or not to be
- * ACRONYMS -- abbreviations that we have turned into words: NATO, NASA, NAFTA
- * ALPHABETISMS -- abbreviations where we say the letters: BBC, GOP, PTA, DC
- * LOGOGRAMS -- a symbol represents a word or part of a word: b4, @om, 2day
- * EMOTICONS -- keyboard characters are used together to show emotions: :-) :-P (*o*)
- * INITIALS -- N=no, GF=girlfriend, OMG=oh my god, PM=post meridian (first used in 1666), IOU=I owe you (first used in 1618), FYI, ASAP, SOS, PB&J
- * SEMITIC LANGUAGES --often omit vowels in writing
- * ABBREVIATIONS -- dept, sgt, Mrs., cm, kg, ft
- * NON-STANDARD SPELLINGS -- ya, thru, nite, luv, gonna, thanx, wassup (many found in the literature)

of greats like Twain and Dickens)

* SHORTENINGS -- exam, phone, mon, tues, uni, bro, biog, inclu, gov, doc, max, diff, mob (short for "mobile vulgus")

* LANGUAGE PLAY -- LOL, ROFL, ROFLMAO (rolling on floor laughing my ass off

The author insists that users of abbreviated language of all sorts (including texters) consider the appropriateness of using abbreviations based on the audience's familiarity with abbreviations, the age of the audience, and the formality of the writing situation. The author also insists that there is no proof that texting has hurt classroom literacy rates. Students often find it helpful for notetaking but know not to use it for essays or assignments. In fact, a 2006-7 study at Coventry University found that students who used more abbreviations when writing text messages actually scored higher on reading and vocabulary. The reason is that a student has to know how to use the language properly before he or she can play with it and morph it. Converting regular language into an alternate language requires creativity, good visual memory, and good motor skills.

I think that anyone who enjoys linguistics and words would be interested in reading this book. If you find alternate spellings and language play to be annoying, this book might open your eyes to the creative side of it. And if you're afraid language is suffering from language abnormalities in text messages, this book might encourage you to see texting in a more positive light. Also, if you're in need of a text-language dictionary, this book has not only one in English, but also one in Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Welsh.

Note: While I critique both purchased and free books in the same way, I'm legally obligated to tell you I received this book free through the Amazon Vine program in return for my review. Blah blah blah.

Moira Clunie says

central premise: txt language is not as unusual nor as widespread as you might think, and it's not about to destroy the english language, kthx. i knew this, but it was interesting to read some statistical backup and linguistic analysis. the most interesting parts of this book were about txt poetics (analysing the results of some txtmsg poetry competitions), and looking at abbreviations in other languages & among bilingual populations. this book also introduced me to vocab for the pairs of words that are created by the same sequence of numbers in predictive text systems: 'textonyms' or 'homonumeric words' (recent favourite: friend txted me that her colleague would make me a list of fairy free eating establishments in nyc).

a favourite poem, that reminded me of another friend:

The wet rustle of rain
can dampen today. Your text
buoys me above oil-rainbow puddles
like a paper boat, so that even
soaked to the skin
I am grinning.

(Ben Ziman-Bright)

Deb says

lol & lrn

Although critics have panicked and seen "text-ese" as a sign that language (and the young users of it) are rapidly devolving, Crystal presents a convincing argument for how texting is actually "language in evolution." He explores how many of the often criticized features of texting--its pictograms, logograms, initialisms, abbreviations, and non-standard spellings--have been a part of linguistic development since the first word was written. He also shows how texting not only follows a similar path of development to other languages over time, but its inherencies of being quick, convenient, focused, personal, multi-tasking-friendly, empowering, and, of course fun, allow communication to be taken to new levels of creativity and function. Adding ample ammunition the gr8t txt db8t, Crystal's book offers well-supported pro-texting arguments, entertaining texting excerpts, and (often not-so-entertaining) lists and tables of texting usages in over 11 languages. Imho (in my humble opinion), readers seeking a light look at texting may say iooh (I'm out of here) when this book starts getting too technical, but language lovers will likely devour every word of this book.

Nina Chachu says

A bit academic in places, but a pretty readable "defence" of texting. Didn't talk much about the impact of texting on the developing world, but one can't have everything!

Joel Arnold says

The book discusses texting from a linguistic standpoint. Crystal identifies the linguistic mechanisms and dynamics at work in texting and places it in historical context. One chapter also gives a limited discussion of texting in other languages. If you like linguistics you will probably enjoy this book.

The primary focus of the book, however, is the common allegation that texting is destroying people's ability to write and communicate legibly. Crystal points out that (1) similar phenomena have existed throughout English history, (2) many of the reports of linguistic corruption because of texting are overblown or patently untrue.

Turning the debate on its head, he argues that texting actually has a positive influence on language skills. (1) It's difficult to break the rules or abbreviate words without some awareness of what the spelling is normally, (2) fewer people use abbreviations in their texts than is popularly thought, (3) even teens completely understand the difference between formal and informal writing, and (4) any language activity is an opportunity for practice and creativity.

I enjoyed this book because it provided a perspective contrary to what seems faddish recently. I've become weary of dramatic Postman / McLuhan-esque jeremiads on how technology is destroying us. Crystal offered a realistic linguistic evaluation of what is going on, acknowledging that people will adapt and use technology in ways that are fundamentally the same. If you want to understand his argument of the book in a few

minutes, read the first and last chapters.

Highlights that were interesting to me:

- Many of the "new" linguistic dynamics aren't new at all—similar things have been happening for more than 100 years.
 - People thought that literacy was in terrible decline among young people as long ago as the 1920s!
 - There are real, identifiable linguistic mechanisms at work that are mirrored in other languages. On the other hand, each language evidences distinctive mechanisms stemming from distinctive phenomena in that language.
 - The book was yet another confirmation that the discipline (linguistics) is sufficient to explain a wide variety of phenomena, and that technology hasn't changed anything about the fundamental dynamics at work.
-

Moira says

Excellent, witty and easy read - and a convincing argument. I started out as someone who hated the way text speak was apparently massacring the language ... but he won me over.

Bojan Tunguz says

I am one of those people who never got into the whole texting craze, primarily because I hardly ever use my cell phone and I rarely chat with my friends online. Even when I do, I try to write in full sentences and be as clear in my prose as possible. However, I am not beyond ever condescending to the new texting abbreviations, and would occasionally pepper my chats with LOL, ROTFL, and of course ', nor would I begrudge my interlocutors when they do the same. So, I am not someone who gets too flustered with texting as such. It's texting that happens in inappropriate settings that really gets to me. I like to interact with people in various online forums, and when they write whole essays in txt-speak, and I find myself spending more time decoding what they wrote than on the content of their arguments, then I take an exception to this whole business of texting.

I am writing all this in order to give you my overall perspective on texting prior to reading this book. My attitude could be summed up as ambivalent to weary. So I decided to pick up this book and learn more about texting from a professional linguist, someone who has invested a great deal of time to study texting habits and put it in a perspective of language use and development in general. And for the most part, David Crystal does a wonderful job at that. The book is filled with nice and illuminating examples, the parallels to previous changes in our use of language were appropriate and thought provoking. The book does a great job in convincing me that there is really nothing either deviant or inappropriate about how texting came to be. And I was also convinced that people who txt are not ruining the English language nor are they hurting their own writing skills. However, the book does not deal at all with the use of texting in online discussion forums, my own personal pet peeve. But other than that, it is a very well written book. It also provides an illuminating and handy glossary of main terms, as well a list of text abbreviations from eleven different languages. These are fun to look at and an interesting glimpse into how other languages deal with texting.

If you ever have to come across texting in your daily life (and who doesn't these days), and whatever your attitude to texting may be, you could benefit from reading this interesting little book.

Daniel says

To tell you the truth, the only part of this book I found truly useful is an appendix listing a significant number of English text abbreviations. Potential readers should take note of the fact that author David Crystal is a professor of linguistics, and so the focus of the book is on the changes - be they positive or negative or both - that the exponential growth in text messaging may or may not be making to language. Don't let that "the gr8 db8" subtitle fool you - there's very little in the way of debate in these pages (Crystal declares text messaging to be a good thing at the end of Chapter 1). It's a pretty boring read, to tell you the truth. I certainly don't see very many people, particularly young individuals, reading this with fascination or great interest.

I try to stay ahead of the crowd when it comes to technology, but I have resisted text messaging - and cell phones in general - for some time now. Having spent four years working at a helpdesk, I pretty much hate telephones; many is the time I've cursed the name of Alexander Graham Bell over the years. I do have a cell phone now, but it's only because my parents foisted one on me; unfortunately, they didn't add text messaging to their plan, so I've never really been able to play around with that technology. Working on a university campus, though, I'm certainly aware that the text messages are flying all around me all day long, and I want and need to learn more about the subject. I'm also aware, albeit tangentially, that the quality of student writing seems to be headed in the wrong direction in recent years, and I've been inclined to agree with those who blame that decline in part on the rise of text messaging. I really wanted to see a substantive debate on that question, but I just don't think this book delivered on its promise in that regard.

Among his reasons for writing this book, David Crystal talks about the lack of any such book bringing together all of the disparate academic studies and papers on text messaging vis-à-vis language. He definitely mined the research fields pretty thoroughly. Unfortunately, the continuous references to all these studies makes for some pretty dry reading for the non-academic. To make matters worse, I can't buy in to some of Crystal's findings and conclusions. For one thing, a lot of these studies involved comparatively small groups. With little to no information on the full scope of possible variables on these studies, I can't help but find them suspect. Even if the data were rock solid and reflected the analysis of much larger study groups, I question some of the author's conclusions, especially since he seemingly made up his mind early on that text messaging's positives outweigh its negatives.

While Crystal does provide a history of text messaging, lays out its unique qualities, and offers his analysis of who uses it and why, I wouldn't really recommend this book to anyone who just wants to learn more about text messaging in general. This is, for the most part, a dry and somewhat academic read. The chapter on text messaging in languages other than English was nothing short of an ordeal. Even if you are familiar with some of the terms in these different languages, you might want to just skip that chapter altogether.

To be sure, there are some interesting facts for readers to glean from these pages, but my feeling is that those with an interest in linguistics may be the only readers who will truly appreciate the author's efforts. The average reader may well have to grit his teeth and persevere just to make it through to the end.

Tim P says

This book is not written by a cranky old man, an exasperated teacher, nor a giggly 15 year old girl twittering about her love for Twilight characters. It is written by a linguistics professor, which is what makes it so fascinating. Weighing in on the debate about whether texting is destroying the English language or whether it is a natural evolution of the language, Crystal compiles a series of compelling essays that can be devoured in one sitting. Especially interesting: the cultural differences in texting in Europe and Asia. Recommend, especially if you teach or have teenagers. I did think it was weird that the entire works cited was just web sites, though.

Susan says

Good for its date of writing (2006 or so) but dated now. Crystal's usual clear & witty prose.

Laura says

This was interesting in an anecdotal way for the first 50 pages or so. But the author really didn't have anything profound to say, and the book (published in 2008) already seems dated.

Lauren Fecht says

Why does our language have to be so specific and rigid? Who's to say that we can't change it as we go and still make sense of it? Our technology age has done just that. "Text Talk" as it is most commonly referred is taking over the younger students' vocabulary and expression around the world. Words and phrases are shortened to meet the character limits of text messaging as well as to speed up the process of texting. If you think about it, it's pretty smart! It is basically a new code developed by our younger generations to communicate.

Some scholars are in an uproar, however. They feel that this type of communication is ruining students' vocabulary and correct use of grammar. In Crystal's book, *Txtng: The gr8 db8*, David Crystal examines some ways that text talking actually enhances literacy skills rather than promoting a decline. He talks about the lack of research to back up the idea of texting as a disadvantage to our students' literacy skills. His primary argument is that texting uses shorthand but does not alter the sentence structure. His examples of "text poetry" portray the sophistication of word choice and complexity of structure that is still intact when using text-language.

One of Crystal's points that stuck out to me the most was that we have actually been using this type of writing for many years. Maybe not to the extent it is used today and certainly not with the technology we use today, but it has been around for a long time. For example, we have used abbreviations such as I.O.U, or M.I.A. throughout our history. Once the abbreviations were being sent via cell phones or over the Internet, people began to question its effects. Crystal is right. Why are we beginning to question this type of communication now?

I feel that text talk actually enhances the communication process and opens more avenues for communication. Some students have a hard time communicating face to face so texting allows for a less-stressful situation for these types of students. Since most texting devices have a character limit, the use of

text talk helps to broaden the information that is communicated. Without text talk, the “texter” may have to eliminate some important information that is to be shared. Also, texting is more efficient than calling in some situations. I do not think that speaking over the phone and face-to-face should be eliminated, but I find texting and using text talk to be a time saving communication tool.

Crystal makes some great points throughout the book and I have to agree with him. I do not think text talk is ruining our younger generations ability to effectively communicate, in fact, I think it is enhancing it as I mentioned previously. The fact that research shows that text talk actually follows sentence form and structure tells me that these kids are practicing writing skills more frequently than ever before. I remember going through summers when I was younger without ever picking up a pen or pencil. Now, we have students writing all day, everyday, to communicate with friends. I do not see this as a problem at all.

I would rate, *Txtng: the gr8 db8*, with 4 out of 5 stars. I did not give a perfect score because I feel the book could have been shorter and had the same effect. The book seemed to go on forever and sometimes repeated the same information and research over and over again. I would recommend this book for teachers as well as parents. I feel that young teachers as well as older teachers could benefit from the information contained in *Txtng: the gr8 db8*.

Richard says

Given that this book was first published in 2008, and has sat unread on my shelf since then, I expected that it would be outdated, and largely superseded by developments in technology. With the continued rise of social networking platforms that blur the distinction between text messages, online chat, and blogging, and with the move away from mobile phones with numeric keypads in favour of smartphones and tablets with touchscreens, the 160-character text message may not be around in its current form for ever.

In spite of this, David Crystal's book remains fresh largely due to its central argument that much of what appears distinctive about the linguistic forms used in text messages is not an aberrant novelty, but part of a long-established phenomenon of linguistic innovation and language play. There's not a "gr8" deal of "db8" here, and it's hard to avoid the suspicion that the book's sub-title was chosen for the opportunity it presented to use text abbreviations - indeed, the author even hints at something of the sort at one point (p. 22) - but what there is is a clear and convincing rebuttal of concerns about the possibly pernicious influence of text message language on literacy.

Ultimately, *Txtng* is less a book than an extended article padded out with the help of a largely unnecessary glossary and two redundant appendices of text abbreviations in English and eleven other languages (these sections taking up 53 of the 229 pages), but it is interesting and well-argued, and Crystal's conclusion that teachers need to equip learners with the ability to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate contexts for the use of *any* language variety, not just the language of text messages, is a compelling one.
