

# "I can has rules?" A Syntactic Analysis of Lolspeak



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## Introduction

The goal of this study was to analyze the sentence structure (syntax) of the language used in the internet meme, "Lolcats," a collection of user-created pictures of captioned cats. This variant language, "Lolspeak," varies most notably from standard English in spelling and morphology, but there are also morphosyntactic features that follow rules similar to those found in other variations dialects of a language. These differences illustrate that while Lolspeak originated as a play on "bad" grammar, there is a degree of consistency that points to Lolspeak as a form of English that is different rather than "bad," one that is potentially useful in the study of the structure of Language.

## Methodology

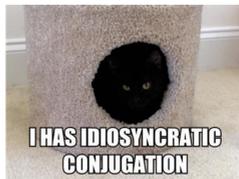
A corpus of Lolspeak sentences was collected from online sources:

- The Lolcat Bible Project ([www.lolcatbible.com](http://www.lolcatbible.com))
- Captions on Lolcat pictures circulating the internet
- Various Lolspeak forums

Though the most prominent difference between Lolspeak and Standard English is a variant orthography (spelling), the focus of this study is morphosyntactic.

## Results and Syntactic Rules

- 42% of Lolspeak sentences had aspects of syntax that deviated from Standard English (SE)
- Deviations occurred in predictable patterns
- Rules were not followed in every possible situation



### DO NOT WANT

1. An Ceiling Cat hadz dry placez cuz kittes DO NOT WANT get wet.  
(And Ceiling Cat had dry places because kitties do not want to get wet)
2. I DO NOT WANT be Saint – they so hard to live with  
(I do not want to be a Saint – they are so hard to live with)
  - Lack of "to" in the embedded clauses where they would normally appear in SE (1-2)
  - Do-support is usually omitted in lolspeak, but it always appears in this phrase.



### /t Subject Omission

3. Iz not sew grate akshully.  
([It] is not so great actually)
4. An Ceiling Cat sawed iz good  
(And Ceiling Cat saw that [it] is good)
  - Only appears with a form of be as the main verb (Is/iz, was/wuz)
  - Appears when "it" could be used as a subject before the verb
  - Appears in different tenses and embedded clauses

### Can Has

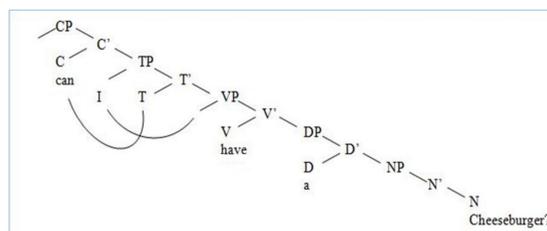
5. I can has cheezburger?  
(Can I have a cheeseburger?)
6. Ceiling Cat sayz, i can haz lite?  
(Ceiling Cat says, can I have light?)



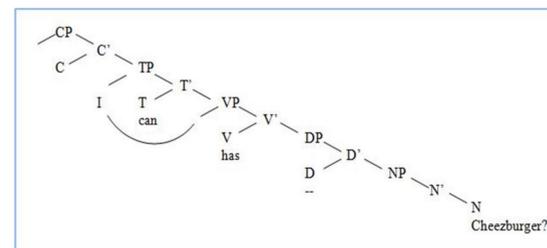
- Lolspeak question formation is usually the same as SE except in this case, similar to the lack of do support except for in the construction "do not want."
- Goes against Lolspeak grammar to break up *can* and *has*.

### Movement in "Can Has"

Movement in Standard English Question Construction



Movement in Lolspeak "Can Has?" Construction



The "Can has" construction does not exhibit the same question formation as in SE, or in other questions in Lolspeak. The diagram above displays the movement both in the SE and Lolspeak construction. In SE, "can" moves out of the tense position to fulfill a [+Q] condition in the CP. This movement does not occur in "can has," resulting in the variant word order.

### Nouns from Adjectives and Verbs



7. If u doez gud stuf, u wil has a happee.  
(If you do good stuff, you will have a happy.)
8. n jus incas evry1 was not teh unstand  
(And just in case everyone was not the understand...)
  - Usually appears with "teh."
  - Similar to the change that has occurred with the slang usage in English of "fail" as a noun instead of using the noun "failure"

### Optional do-support

9. wai u eated nasty cheezburgerz?  
(Why [did] you eat nasty cheeseburger?)
10. But Ceiling Cat no eated dem.  
(But Ceiling Cat [did] not eat them.)
  - Affixes are lowered to the main verb instead of the do auxiliary as in SE (because there is none)
  - Appears in questions and negative constructions



### Optional be

11. An so teh furth day w00t.  
(And so [it is] the fourth day, woot!)
12. No, you gonna call him Happy Cat.  
(No, you [are] going to call him Happy Cat.)
  - Main verb "to be" is often omitted in declarative sentences and questions
  - Also omitted as an auxiliary in progressive and infinitive constructions



### Additional be Auxiliary

13. Teh lite iz pwins teh darks, but teh darks iz liek "Wtf."  
(The light is "pwins" the dark, but the dark is like, "WTF.")
14. An she is has teh kid enoch  
(And she is has the kid Enoch)
  - Tense is not always accounted for (14)
  - No grammatical information added by this additional "be."

## Conclusion

While Lolspeak was conceived as a humorous way to caption images of cats, it has developed into a language register with its own syntactic rules. These rules, while not wholly consistent in all Lolspeak usage, occur in predictable patterns with a high enough regularity to resemble differences between Standard English and other natural dialects. These findings are potentially useful for further study of nontraditional ways in which English can be transformed syntactically, or of how syntax can be manipulated to convey humor or other imbedded meanings. In short, Kitties "can has" rules. As they say in Lolspeak, kthnxbai!

### Acknowledgements

This poster was printed with funding from Differential Tuition. Special thanks to Dr. Erica Benson, Dr. Lynsey Wolter, and the linguistics students that participated in the poster workshop for their input.

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