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Social Media and Language Learning

Using TikTok and Instagram

YEONG-JU LEE



Social Media and Language Learning

This book explores creative uses of social media for informal language learning. It focuses on the underexplored area of how informal language learning adapts to technological innovations in two multimodal media-sharing platforms: TikTok and Instagram.

Drawing on ecological perspectives of language learning and spatial understandings of digital technology and learning, the research reported in this book unpacks how social media technologies are used for language learning. It presents insights from a dual-level qualitative methodological design: a comparative study of public online data of social media posts collected from TikTok and Instagram, and a multiple case study based on ethnographic narrative data gathered from participants' journal entries, stimulated recall interviews, and social media posts. This book reveals the dynamic landscape of digital language learning that is being integrated into learners' everyday lives through multimodal content creation and networking.

This book enriches readers' understanding of social media's role in language learning, and offers pedagogical strategies for teachers to integrate newer technologies and multimodal materials into language classrooms to enhance students' learning experiences.

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Yeong-Ju Lee

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | <i>ix</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | <i>x</i> |
| <i>List of Abbreviations</i> | <i>xi</i> |
| | |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction to the Book | 1 |
| 1.2 My Research Behind the Book | 3 |
| 1.2.1 Research Aims | 3 |
| 1.2.2 Research Design: Dual-Level Methodology | 4 |
| 1.3 Overview of the Book | 9 |
| | |
| 2 Informal Language Learning through Social Media: Theories and Empirical Studies | 11 |
| 2.1 Informal Digital Language Learning in CALL Research | 11 |
| 2.2 Critical Theoretical Concepts and Ideas | 15 |
| 2.2.1 Agency/Autonomy and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory | 15 |
| 2.2.2 Multimodality | 16 |
| 2.2.3 New/Digital Literacies | 17 |
| 2.2.4 Transnational Networks and Globalisation | 17 |
| 2.2.5 Language Learning Ecology and Affordances | 18 |
| 2.3 Empirical Studies on Multimodal Media-Sharing Platforms | 20 |
| 2.3.1 Instagram | 20 |
| 2.3.2 TikTok | 21 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 2.4 | <i>Research Gaps and Research Questions</i> | 22 |
| 2.5 | <i>Theoretical Framework: A Spatial Perspective on Technology Use for Language Learning</i> | 23 |
| 2.6 | <i>Summary</i> | 27 |
| 3 | Language Learning Affordances of Visual and Multimodal Social Networking: A Comparative Study of Online Data of Social Media Posts on Instagram and TikTok | 28 |
| 3.1 | <i>Multimodal Affordances of Language Learning Online</i> | 29 |
| 3.1.1 | <i>TikTok: Pronunciation and Speaking Practice through Auditory and Visual Affordances</i> | 30 |
| 3.1.2 | <i>Instagram: Grammar and Idiom Learning through Visual and Textual Affordances</i> | 35 |
| 3.2 | <i>Repurposing Social Media as Language Learning Spaces: Towards More Multimodal, Creative, and Spatially-Connected Global Interactions</i> | 41 |
| 3.2.1 | <i>Interdependence of Affordance, Agency, and Creativity in Multimodal Digital Language Learning</i> | 42 |
| 3.2.2 | <i>Spatial Affordances: Global Networking and Transcending Boundaries</i> | 43 |
| 3.3 | <i>Pedagogical Implications</i> | 44 |
| 3.3.1 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 1: Building Digital Genre Awareness through Social Media Curation and Comparison</i> | 45 |
| 3.3.2 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 2: Designing Interactive Pronunciation Practice Inspired by TikTok Posts</i> | 45 |
| 3.3.3 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 3: Leveraging Instagram Carousels to Teach Grammar and Idioms</i> | 46 |
| 3.3.4 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 4: Facilitating Peer Interaction and Collaborative Meaning-Making</i> | 48 |
| 3.3.5 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 5: Creating and Curating Social Media-Inspired Content Using Hashtags and Discovery Tools</i> | 48 |
| 3.4 | <i>Summary</i> | 49 |
| 4 | Language Learning Experiences with Everyday Social Media Uses: A Multiple Case Study on Ethnographic Data of Users' Narratives | 51 |
| 4.1 | <i>Moving Between Two Worlds: Everyday Access to Digital Resources and Language Learning</i> | 52 |

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 4.1.1 | <i>Integration 1: Saving and Reviewing Digital Content in Different Settings and Places</i> | 52 |
| 4.1.2 | <i>Integration 2: Searching for Linguistic Information Encountered in In-place Interactions</i> | 54 |
| 4.1.3 | <i>Integration 3: Perceiving a Sense of Mobility and Spatial Presence through Digital Content</i> | 57 |
| 4.1.4 | <i>Integration 4: Creating Digital Content to Reflect on Learning Experiences in Everyday Life Space</i> | 58 |
| 4.1.5 | <i>Integration 5: Conceptual Change of the Relationship between Digital Learning and Everyday Life Spaces</i> | 63 |
| 4.2 | <i>A Language Learning Environment Encompassing Digital and Physical Spaces</i> | 65 |
| 4.2.1 | <i>Integrations 1 and 2: Spatially Situated Experiences of Digital Language Learning</i> | 65 |
| 4.2.2 | <i>Integrations 3 and 4: Spatial Connectedness Mediated through Multimodal Learning and Screens</i> | 66 |
| 4.2.3 | <i>Integration 5: Conceptual Integration of Language Learning Between Digital and Everyday Life Spaces</i> | 67 |
| 4.3 | <i>Pedagogical Implications</i> | 68 |
| 4.3.1 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 1: Developing Contextualised Digital Language Learning Portfolios</i> | 69 |
| 4.3.2 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 2: Scaffolding Out-of-Class Language Learning through Digital Spatial Storytelling</i> | 70 |
| 4.3.3 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 3: Mapping Language-in-Space Encounters Through Visual Simulation</i> | 71 |
| 4.3.4 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 4: Collaborative Language Learning Podcasts</i> | 72 |
| 4.3.5 | <i>Pedagogical Strategy 5: Supporting Meta-Awareness of Language Learning Across Digital and Physical Spaces</i> | 72 |
| 4.4 | <i>Summary</i> | 73 |
| 5 | <i>Conclusion</i> | 74 |
| 5.1 | <i>Contributions</i> | 74 |
| 5.1.1 | <i>Cross-Study Conclusions and Contributions: Theoretical and Practical Insights in the Spatial Framework</i> | 75 |
| 5.1.2 | <i>Cross-Study Conclusions and Contributions: Pedagogical Insights into the Role of Social Media for Language Learning</i> | 76 |

viii *Contents*

*5.2 Learning from Present Studies: Towards More Multimodal
and Spatial Language Learning Dynamics 77*

5.3 Concluding Remarks 79

References 80

Index 87

Illustrations

Figures

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 1.1 | Dual-level Methodological Design | 4 |
| 3.1 | A TikTok Post Comparing the Voiced /z/ and Voiceless /s/ Sounds | 32 |
| 3.2 | A TikTok Post Introducing Various Ways to Say ‘I’m tired’ | 35 |
| 3.3 | A Carousel Instagram Post Explaining ‘Infinitive’ and ‘Gerund’ Verb Forms with Examples and a Quiz | 36 |
| 3.4 | A Carousel Instagram Post on the Idiom ‘Agree to Disagree’ with Examples | 39 |
| 4.1 | TikTok’s Interface for the Content Saving Feature in a Profile | 53 |
| 4.2 | Instagram’s Interface Feature for Organising Content in a Profile | 55 |
| 4.3 | Shasha’s TikTok Example | 59 |
| 4.4 | Joy’s TikTok Example | 60 |
| 4.5 | Shasha’s Instagram Example | 61 |
| 4.6 | Jieun’s Instagram Example | 62 |

Table

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1.1 | Participants’ Background Information | 7 |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| AR | Augmented Reality |
| CALL | Computer Assisted Language Learning |
| CMC | Computer-Mediated Communication |
| DMs | Direct Messages |
| IDLE | Informal Digital Learning of English |
| EE | Extramural Engagement |
| MALL | Mobile-Assisted Language Learning |
| OILE | Online Informal Learning of English |
| Vlogs | Video blogs |



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1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an account of my personal interest in the research on which this book is based. It then presents the research aims and provides an overview of the research design, outlining the methodology adopted to address these aims. The chapter concludes with an outline of the contents of the book chapters.

1.1 Introduction to the Book

This book explores language learners' creative uses of social media for informal language learning, that is, not for formal institutional and instructional purposes. In this book, informal language learning includes both informal learning from social media posts not designed as teaching materials, and non-formal learning from posts designed as teaching materials but accessed outside the classroom (Lai, 2017). My interest in this topic began with my observations of people's digital experiences. Since the global corona virus pandemic began in 2020, it has become evident to me that we have entered into a new era of second or foreign language learning as international students spend much more time at home and online. We have become remarkably adept at using digital resources and technologies such as video conferencing tools and social networking platforms to maintain both distant and local social relationships. However, social media is constantly developing, and technological advances adopted by popular applications have enabled online communications and networking to become increasingly multimodal. I realised that a new awareness and appreciation of digital resources and technologies in the area of language education is needed. As a result of lockdowns and social

2 Social Media and Language Learning

restrictions, people have also become more creative with how they access social contexts by, for example, reflecting their everyday lives into digital spaces to share with others. As a user of several social media applications, I have observed that photo- or video-sharing social networking platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are increasingly used as spaces for individuals to communicate multimodally by creating and sharing digital content of daily life activities such as cooking and exercising via images. Another observation was that these image-based platforms have become spaces of interaction for billions of individuals with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds across the world. This inspired me to reflect on the potential of intercultural and translingual interaction and learning, which formed the basis of my research. These observations led me to contemplate how language learning can occur in social media environments, and how such learning is changing due to technological innovations that support online communication visually and multimodally using social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing social networking platform launched in 2010. The application is renewed by its photographic filters which enable users to enhance the visual appeal of content. TikTok is a video-sharing social networking platform launched in China in 2016, and globally in 2018. The application is renowned for supporting the creation of short-format videos such as dances to popular songs via user-friendly in-application video editors which enable almost any user to become a content creator. Instagram and TikTok were ranked as the world's most downloaded social media applications in 2022 and 2023, respectively (Statista, 2024). Recent studies have shown that language learners frequently use these platforms to create and share language learning content through communication based on sharing images rather than solely relying on written texts (e.g., Gomes Junior, 2020; Lee, 2023; Lee & Roger, 2023; Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2022, 2023). This image-based communication is often favourable for technology use while “on the move”, as it offers easily accessible, creative, and engaging ways to acquire language skills.

This book contributes to our understanding of the current phenomenon of informal digital language learning through visual and multimodal social networking on the aforementioned platforms. It seeks to demonstrate how language learners leverage social media not designed for language learning as a resource for this purpose – specifically, how they *repurpose* visual and multimodal content for

language learning. As such, it provides readers with insights into how language learners explore and navigate social media spaces to find linguistic materials, and to organise learning opportunities in creative and autonomous ways. Moreover, it demonstrates how the incorporation of digital language learning into everyday lives can be achieved. Subsequently, this book also provides pedagogical recommendations for teachers to assist technology-mediated language learning, especially for future generations of language learners, and those who wish to experience newer methods of learning.

1.2 My Research Behind the Book

This book is based on my research project conducted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy undertaken from 2020 to 2023. It re-examines my research data that offer specific insights into the pedagogical implications of integrating social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok into language classrooms. It explores their practical applications in supporting language students' learning. In the following sections, I explain the research aims and an overview of the research design, outlining the methodology chosen to achieve the research aims.

1.2.1 Research Aims

The main purpose of my research project was to understand language learners' uses of social media for informal, out-of-class language learning. This included both informal learning from posts not designed as teaching tools, and non-formal learning from posts designed as teaching tools outside of institutional contexts (Lai, 2017). It primarily aimed to demonstrate how social media platforms serve as spaces for language learning, in which global users interact with each other while engaging with the target language. Specifically, it strived to examine how newer technological features employed in popular image-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok support users to use and learn the target language. This research focus aimed to show how the platforms enable users to create and access shared networking spaces across physical distances, and how these spaces facilitate language learning through technological innovations. Therefore, the research project examined how informal digital language learning adapts to technological advances of Instagram and TikTok.

4 Social Media and Language Learning

Building on the examination of the influences of technological advances on digital language learning, the research project further explored the experiences of social media use from the perspectives of individual users. It particularly investigated how individual users' digital language learning was incorporated within their everyday lives. This investigation endeavoured to expand the context of digital learning not only beyond the classroom but also into the wider environment of an individual's daily life. It also allowed me to focus on users' experiences around using Instagram and TikTok, and other resources such as online dictionaries to promote language learning. Consequently, this research project aimed to enrich the current understanding of social media use for language learning by analysing both a platform and its users. In this way, a more holistic view of individuals' everyday experiences of digital language learning could be achieved.

1.2.2 Research Design: Dual-Level Methodology

To obtain the research aims above, the research adopted qualitative methodology in two ways: (1) content analysis of public online data of social media posts collected from Instagram and TikTok (a comparative study); and (2) narrative and thematic analyses of student participants' data gathered from journal entries, stimulated recall interviews, and social media posts (a multiple case study). As visualised in Figure 1.1, this dual-level methodological design aimed to pull together a content analysis of digital language-learning content, and an ethnographic and narrative analysis of how users appropriate and interact with it. A particular merit of this methodology is its capability to shed light on both dimensions of the digital language learning process: (1) how social media support the creation of digital language-learning content; and (2) how learners consume and appropriate that content.

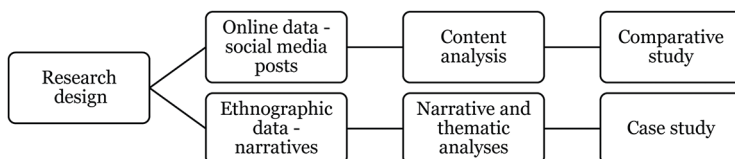


Figure 1.1 Dual-level Methodological Design.

The comparative study examined how language learning occurs on the two platforms and how ways of learning are changing in response to technological innovations. The multiple case study focused on learners' voices and perspectives on how they leveraged these innovations in their daily lives. The comparative-study analysis revealed a broader understanding of digital language learning on each platform (included in Chapter 3), whereas the case-study analysis elicited the detailed voices and perspectives of users who decide to articulate its usage for their own learning purposes (included in Chapter 4). The following sections illustrate in detail the methods selected for the data collection and analysis of each study design.

1.2.2.1 Comparative Study: Online data of Instagram and TikTok Posts

Online data from public social media posts on Instagram and TikTok were gathered using multiple online data collection techniques. As a user of each platform, I employed “participant observation” with an emic approach to identify potential experiences that language learners may encounter while using it (Androutsopoulos, 2013). “Hashtag tracking” – searching for words or phrases prefaced by the symbol # to mark digital content on a certain topic – was also implemented to examine trends and overall usage in specific language learning content such as #languagelearning, #languagechallenge, and #learn[a language] (Laestadius, 2017; Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2022). As many posts as possible were collected until “the variety of post types” for sampling reached saturation (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017).

Data collection was conducted over two months from May 2021 by me as a user exploring the platforms for about 30–60 minutes per day. A data set of 200 Instagram photos/video posts and another 200 TikTok video posts were saved in my account on each platform, created specifically for this research. The data set included posts from hundreds of users; either shared by creators or reused by other users. The three criteria for including a post in the data set were: (1) a “viral” post ranked in the “top” category – to reflect overall usage and trends in language learning content; (2) the use of English language by English-speaking users to teach English, or to learn another language – to analyse the content based on the researcher’s literacy; and (3) an orientation towards learning or educational purposes – to exclude posts not obviously related to language learning such as travel videos. The third criterion also enabled the inclusion of posts intended

6 *Social Media and Language Learning*

for learning or teaching linguistic knowledge, and posts not originally created for learning or teaching but included language use applied by student participants for learning purposes (e.g., a post featuring a useful expression even if it was not specifically created to teach that expression). The data set also included posts not tagged with learning-specific hashtags but created for the purpose of language learning such as #english and #englishvocabulary.

Content analysis of the qualitative data compared the uses of Instagram's and TikTok's unique designs and features using the coding procedure in NVivo. The unit of analysis was the diverse modalities of *a post*: (1) language(s) used; (2) linguistic aspects being taught/learned such as vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation; (3) content composition including discourse and inserted text, emojis, or symbols; (4) hashtags and descriptive texts used in a post caption; and (5) technological features used to create a post such as taking a selfie video and combining multiple photos or video clips in a single post.

1.2.2.2 Multiple Case Study: Ethnographic Data Of Participants' Narratives

A case-study design was adopted to undertake a narrative inquiry of narratives collected from five international student participants studying English in Australia. The inquiry explored participants' perspectives of their learning experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2013) with the aim to: (1) access participants' accounts and stories of social media and technology use for language learning; (2) understand how they articulated and interpreted their learning experiences; (3) identify the contextual aspects of participants' everyday-life learning; and (4) identify perceptual changes around language learning derived from social media and technology use. This later aim was significant in this research to tease out the pedagogical implications for language teachers aiming to support students' everyday learning.

The study participants were recruited from students enrolled in a University English Language Centre in Sydney, Australia, which offered intensive academic English courses as part of a pathway to enter undergraduate or graduate degree. Participants were also recruited from a club at the university for English-speaking students. Many students enrolled in the prerequisite intensive courses join this club to improve their speaking skills. The two inclusion criteria used for the recruitment were: (1) voluntary agreement to participate; and (2) willingness to actively engage with digital resources

Table 1.1 Participants' Background Information

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Country of origin</i> |
|-------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Amir | M | Iran |
| Prem | M | Thailand |
| Joy | F | China |
| Shasha | F | Indonesia |
| Jieun | F | Korea |

and technologies for language learning. I also intended to recruit (3) newly-arrived international students (within a month of their arrival) to investigate how their digital engagements influenced their learning experiences while adjusting to new circumstances in the English-speaking country. Table 1.1 introduces the background information of the five participants.

The collection of narrative data was conducted in two blocks: A four-week session in March 2022 for Amir and Prem, and another four-week session in June 2022 for Joy, Shasha, and Jieun. This division of the data collection period allowed for the focus to be placed on individual differences before exploring the shared aspects of the learning experiences. Three data collection sources were used to ensure triangulation: (1) language learning journal entries; (2) stimulated recall interviews; and (3) social media posts. Triangulation of these data sources was performed to construct a multidimensional understanding of the complex and dynamic experiences of individual learners while engaging with diverse digital resources (Socketkett, 2013; Socketkett & Toffoli, 2012). Journal entries and interviews were the main narrative data sources through which participants shared their perceptions of their digital language learning experiences. Journal entries yielded a series of critical stories and events related to language learning, while interviews were conducted to obtain details of the participants' perceptions of the value of their experiences. Social media posts were not analysed directly but were valuable as supplementary data to confirm the intended meanings of the main narrative data and to elicit participants' views on how the digital content creation activity supported language learning.

In particular, the participants were asked to write weekly journal entries about the learning activities and opportunities they engaged with, and the technologies and resources they used. The journal

entries were utilised as written narrative data and as a recall aid during follow-up interviews. Following the completion of each journal entry, a stimulated recall interview was conducted for approximately 60 minutes based on pre-set questions with prompts. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, the participants were encouraged by the researcher, on one occasion, to create and upload social media posts that demonstrate language-related knowledge and learning experiences.

The coding procedure in NVivo comprised a three-stage analysis of narrative data: (1) narrative analysis; (2) analysis of narratives; and (3) cross-case analysis. Firstly, narratives gathered from the three sources were synthesised into “cases” for each individual participant, as a means to arrange numerous small stories and accounts into a sequential order and to construct an individual participant story of digital language learning (Benson, 2014). Secondly, the synthesised narratives were analysed thematically via the procedure to repeatedly refine the themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Narrative analysis focused on the stories and accounts of language learners to make sense of their experiences, whereas the analysis of narratives broke down each narrative into its component parts based on themes in order to study how those parts work together to create meaning. Lastly, the cases were compared with each other to demonstrate both shared and individual learning experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

1.2.2.3 Ethical Considerations

Although social media content is publicly available, I was cognisant of potential privacy concerns when actively participating in social media (Moreno et al., 2013; Taylor & Pagliari, 2018). I strived, as follows, to safeguard elements of the photo or video posts that may lead to the identification of the creators such as usernames, profile pictures, or faces. When using screenshots in this book to provide visual illustrations of actual work, I obtained written consent from individual creators (included in Chapter 3) and student participants (included in Chapter 4). They all were given the choice to remove or reveal their username and/or face. All of them wanted to be identified as the owners of their work and gave consent to have these details retained. For student participants’ data (included in Chapter 4), they also gave consent to be identified in the accompanying text because their usernames are similar to or the same as their real names.

1.3 Overview of the Book

This introductory chapter has provided the context for my personal interest in the research project on which this book is based, which investigated language learners' creative uses of image-based social media for informal language learning. It has also outlined the objectives of the project, provided an overview of the qualitative research design, and detailed the data collection and analysis processes with reference to the specific methods employed for the two different study designs.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature associated with the main research areas of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), especially with Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Extramural Engagement (EE), and language learning in the digital wilds. The chapter then reviews critical theoretical concepts and ideas employed in CALL studies, including agency/autonomy, multimodality, new/digital literacy, transnational networks, globalisation, and language learning ecology/affordance. The purpose of this theoretical review is to establish a theoretical framework to examine how digital language learning is organised on a social media platform and in its user's life. This chapter also reviews empirical studies within two image-based social media, Instagram and TikTok, which are the focus of this book. Based on this literature review, it identifies the research gaps and questions and suggests how this book expands on existing understandings of informal digital language learning from a spatial view.

Chapters 3 to 4 present and discuss the research findings in relation to the overarching research aims proposed in this introductory chapter.

To provide insights into contemporary social networking and language learning online, Chapter 3 uses the database of public online social media posts on Instagram and TikTok. It presents the outcomes of the analysis on the implementation of newer technological features for language learning on these two platforms. It discusses how shared networking spaces within the platforms facilitate language learning through technological innovations supporting multimodal content creation and interaction.

With the aim to explore users' perspectives on the use of online social media for language learning, Chapter 4 uses the database comprised of narrative data collected from five participants' journal

entries, stimulated recall interview responses, and social media posts. It presents the analysis and discussion of how the participants utilised Instagram and TikTok to organise digital language learning within their everyday lives. It also discusses how their perceptions of language learning changed as a result of their social media use in order to illustrate the role that social media can play in informal language learning.

Based on the analysis and discussion presented in Chapters 3 and 4, pedagogical recommendations for language teachers are provided along with specific strategies that are directly applicable to language classrooms. In this way, different pedagogical applications can be highlighted through concrete examples drawn from each chapter's findings. In doing so, I hope that this book provides teachers with practical ways to integrate informal, out-of-class learning experiences into formal classroom settings.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, discusses the contributions of this book in relation to the roles of social media in informal language learning. It highlights the theoretical and practical benefits of incorporating everyday social media use into language learning to enhance students' learning outcomes and to bridge the gap between in-class and out-of-class learning environments. The chapter then proposes suggestions for future research before concluding with some final reflections.

2 Informal Language Learning through Social Media

Theories and Empirical Studies

This chapter reviews the literature and empirical studies associated with the main research areas of this book. Section 2.1 explores the current evidence and understandings in the research area of CALL, focusing on MALL, EE, OILE, IDLE, and language learning in the “digital wilds”. It expands the scope of activities that come under the umbrella of CALL into more independent, informal engagement with foreign languages. It ultimately aims to suggest potentially fruitful directions for CALL research. Section 2.2 outlines critical theoretical concepts and ideas employed in CALL studies including: agency/autonomy, complex dynamic systems, multimodality, new/digital literacies, transnational networks, globalisation, and language learning ecology/affordance. This section explores how these theoretical insights shape our understanding of informal online learning. Section 2.3 reviews studies within two image-based social media: Instagram and TikTok. Based on this literature review, Section 2.4 identifies the research gaps and questions. To address these research questions, Section 2.5 develops “a spatial perspective” as an overarching theoretical framework, suggesting how this book expands the existing knowledge of CALL research.

2.1 Informal Digital Language Learning in CALL Research

With the widespread use of mobile applications (Godwin-Jones, 2011), CALL research has considered mobile social media and technology use for language learning since the 2010s. Newer applications designed primarily for use on mobile devices such as Instagram (2010) and TikTok (2018) differ to earlier Web 2.0 platforms first developed

for computers and then adapted to mobile devices. Under the sub-category of MALL or “m-learning”, research has examined how students benefit from using mobile phones and tablets in the classroom (Leier, 2018) or language learning applications such as Duolingo outside the classroom (García Botero et al., 2019). However, only limited focus has been given to how mobile learning assists students to develop self-directed, informal ways of learning using “non-educational” social and recreational applications. Moreover, little focus has been given to how the increased mobility of language learners influences their language use and learning across diverse everyday life spaces where they access applications.

Emerging research in informal language learning highlights the uses of mobile devices and technologies as mediated in individual learners’ everyday activities. In a study on the uses of urban space for informal language learning in study abroad contexts, Benson (2023) emphasised that the physical mobility of a learner, who accesses online language resources via mobile devices in different settings, shapes the circulation of digital information in everyday life. This point is particularly related to the perception of digital information, which is often considered as contained within the device and accessed through the screen.

Moreover, this research has examined the value of “locative” or GPS-enabled mobile media for language learning. Mapping international students’ geographical routines in Sydney using a GPS-enabled application, Benson et al. (2018) observed how students interwove digital technologies into daily activities to navigate urban environments and create spatial contexts to access English. In a study on the value of augmented reality (AR) applications for English learning, Sydorenko et al. (2019) also reported the use of mobile locative media as a catalyst for spatially contextualised language use and practices. They found that new lexical items were learnt through interactions with English speakers as well as with the surrounding physical environment. However, players are often “guided” towards designated areas in school-based or campus-based research settings where the learning interactions are not “experienced” naturally. This excludes experiential data related to informal learning that often occurs beyond school settings and in an individual’s everyday life. Indeed, recent studies have shown that technology use is frequently represented in informal, out-of-class learning through mobile

devices used by individuals as part of their daily lives (Benson, 2021; Godwin-Jones, 2019).

Within the CALL spectrum towards more informal, independent, digital language learning, new categories have proliferated with the realisation that digital activities cannot be separated from learners' everyday lives. Sockett (2014) introduced the term OILE, examining online resources and activities for informal learning beyond language classrooms. He focused on interactive activities enabled by frequent use of the Internet, especially Web 2.0 technologies, including watching TV series and films, listening to pop music, online reading, and social networking activities. OILE studies have thus attempted to examine online resources, and content captured from authentic, daily communication (Sockett, 2013; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012; Toffoli & Sockett, 2015). Sockett and Toffoli (2012), for instance, argued that access to, and the availability of, such resources constitute a major change in English language learning since the 2000s. Similar to OILE, Lee (2021) proposed the term IDLE, to bring together CALL research and theory on English learning activities using digital media and devices in informal contexts. Recent studies have used IDLE as an umbrella term which includes OILE to describe EE (rather than extra-curricular engagement) undertaken outside of educational institutions and classrooms (Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Reinders et al., 2022; Soyoo et al., 2023; Toffoli et al., 2023). Many studies have particularly shown the value of EE for productive vocabulary learning (Sundqvist, 2019; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). This research lays the foundation for autonomous English language learning activities in out-of-school digital settings, performed independently without being evaluated by a teacher.

Furthermore, researchers have increasingly explored how users choose recreational and social activities in digital spaces not designed with language learning in mind. Sauro and Zourou (2019) described this aspect of CALL as the “digital wilds” and defined it as “unstructured” informal language explorations of digital spaces designed for social and recreational, rather than educational purposes. Hellermann and Thorne (2020) viewed language(s) and learning as being “distributed” in these “digital wild” spaces. Related studies have presented numerous online resources and activities. Jensen (2019), for instance, investigated how Danish children view English learning via watching Netflix series with English dialogue, subscribing to

Instagram accounts that post daily English quotes, and following English speakers on Snapchat. Shafirova and Cassany (2019) examined language learning practices among Russian and Spanish adult fans in the *Bronies* community (a fandom of the animated TV series, *My Little Pony*). They found that the fans engaged in intensive fan-related practices in English and effectively used English in real-life situations. These studies indicate that language learners “repurpose” social and recreational sites for learning, highlighting the importance of understanding user perspectives.

On this matter, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) addressed what teachers can do with research on entirely out-of-class learning, and proposed a pedagogical model that involves “bridging activities” (p. 558) introducing online games, wikis, and blogs to class education. This bridging model is designed to connect informal, out-of-class learning with formal, in-class learning. Recent studies have also addressed the pedagogical value and potential of integrating informal social media use into language classrooms (Reinhardt, 2019; Solmaz, 2018). Lai (2015, 2017), in particular, investigated attitudes to in-class and out-of-class learning among Hong Kong university undergraduates studying foreign languages. She emphasised how students traversed in-class and out-of-class learning and sought an ecological balance among activities carried out in these different settings. In addition, Levy and Moore (2018) pointed to the need for user perspectives to illustrate in detail what they actually do and learn every day in social media. This suggests a need to reflect on the different activities that learners engage with in daily life.

In short, digital technologies and designs now seem “limitless”, and to some degree they are beyond the reach of classroom instructions and programmes. This indicates that current technology use is more frequently represented in informal, out-of-classroom learning environments. Indeed, more recent CALL studies have examined current digital language learning experiences by focusing on students’ access to, and utilisation of, social media and technology within their everyday lives (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Han & Reinhardt, 2022; Jensen, 2019; Lai, 2017; Shafirova & Cassany, 2019; Sundqvist, 2019). This research is needed to support ongoing reflection on the latest technological features employed in newer applications and the subsequent digital experiences that may occur. Therefore, these developments suggest two directions for future CALL research: to focus on out-of-class uses of social media, and to take a more holistic view of individual students’ learning.

2.2 Critical Theoretical Concepts and Ideas

A comprehensive literature review identifies several critical theoretical concepts and ideas adopted in CALL research discussed in sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.5. The goal of this discussion is to identify a theoretical model that can synthesise the various theoretical insights and best account for informal digital language learning.

2.2.1 Agency/Autonomy and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory

Benson and Chik (2013) highlighted the importance of “agency” in explaining out-of-class digital literacy practices. They found that Hong Kong youths engaged in multilingual video-gaming practices when actively seeking language learning opportunities such as conversing with overseas players in chat rooms and learning vocabulary. This observation highlights the learners’ agency to turn “recreational” video-game platforms into spaces for language learning. In a multiple case study of language learning “autonomy” in the digital wilds, Han and Reinhardt (2022) demonstrated how three English language learners aligned language activities and digital literacy-mediated identities with their personal lives. Similar instances of agency or autonomy are featured in other studies of fanfiction (Korobkova & Black, 2014; Shafirova & Cassany, 2019), online chatting (Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009), video-sharing (Benson, 2016), and video games (Reinhardt & Thorne, 2020; Sundqvist, 2019).

In order to research OILE, Sockett and Toffoli (2012) argued that a learner autonomy model should be re-conceptualised through the lens of “complex systems theory” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). They posited, firstly, that the autonomy model corresponding to pre-2000 technological realities did not reflect the dynamics of contemporary language use and learning through everyday communications and via mobile devices. Secondly, they emphasised the emergent nature of informal learning in complex dynamic systems in which interactions among various components may lead to unexpected outcomes. They stressed the need to analyse the whole learning process. Lastly, they pointed to the lack of understanding about long-term learning and its transition phases. They explained that the non-linear nature of complex dynamic systems can yield insights into the dynamics of long-term learning. Furthermore, Sockett (2013) highlighted the importance of user perspectives, extending on the term ‘emic’ used by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008). He elucidated

that although collecting data of online informal learning is challenging due to its private nature, emic approaches can analyse the learning process from the learners' perspectives. Analysis of online informal learning within a complex systems framework can thus provide insights into individual aspects of language learning, including agency or autonomy.

2.2.2 Multimodality

Online language practices increasingly require the use of multiple communication modes, including written text, languages, emojis, and visual and/or auditory materials (Kress, 2010; O'Halloran & Smith, 2011). Building on van Leeuwen's (2004) "socio-semiotic theory" that addresses the integration of text and images, multimodal studies have investigated how language and semiotic elements coordinate multimodally to generate meanings in discourse and interaction.

In a multimodal discourse analysis of YouTube comments, for instance, Benson (2016) examined the meaning-making potential of diverse communication modes and their dynamic interaction in a social context. He analysed the design and production of complex multimodal digital texts incorporating images, audio, space, gesture, and features associated with interactivity and multiple authors. Jones et al. (2015) also reported evidence of language learners' translanguaging discourses in YouTube comments and language socialisation in Wikipedia writing projects. The authors emphasised that digital texts encompass various semiotic elements that function as a tool for social action such as videos, photographs, and web sites. Their findings highlight the impact of globalised online spaces on language learning where participants with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds interact through multimodal digital practices.

Many similar studies have demonstrated how multimodal digital practices are used in learning activities in a range of digital spaces from YouTube to 3D virtual gaming-worlds (Tan et al., 2016; Zappavigna, 2019). Furthermore, Androutsopoulos (2013) focused on the participatory nature of multimodal media-sharing platforms. His observation of the co-occurrence of videos and audience responses on YouTube demonstrates a digital experience in which richer multimodality is supported by both the platform and its users. Collectively, these researchers have reflected on everyday communications enabled by the development of digital technology, indicating "multimodality" as

one of the factors that presently motivates language learners to use online resources.

2.2.3 New/Digital Literacies

New Literacies, a phrase coined by the New London Group (1996) in the mid-1990s, is an approach to literacy theory and pedagogy that addresses the proliferation of diverse communication modes enabled by the Internet and digital media. The new literacy approach is often found in studies based on “discourse analysis” emphasising how text “mediates” action and social interaction.

For instance, Barton and Lee (2013) analysed multimodal literacy practices and meaning-making writing on Web 2.0, including blogs and social networking sites like Flickr primarily devoted to image sharing. They reconceptualised the concept of “vernacular literacies” to reflect changes in social and leisure activities in “new” media (e.g., making connections with others from whom they wish to receive more *likes* on shared photos) and the multimodal characteristics of literacy practices. With evidence of language learning in YouTube comments and Wikipedia writing projects, Hafner et al. (2015) used an alternative term, “digital literacies”, to reference “the kind of reading, writing, and communication that occurs in online, digitally mediated contexts” (p. 1). They argued that such literacy practices in new globalised, digital environments demand a different set of skills to those “traditional” skills taught in language classrooms; for example, remixing texts and collaborating with others. Based on discourse analysis of micro-blogging “tweets” – written posts on Twitter – Zappavigna (2015) examined new ways of online writing and the linguistic function of “hashtags” in tweets. She highlighted the role of “hashtag literacy” as related to the study of relatively recent digital literacies. In short, these researchers demonstrated how “new/digital literacies” are relevant to understanding current informal online learning, suggesting that it is critical to language learning online while participating in linguistic and social activities.

2.2.4 Transnational Networks and Globalisation

Lam (2014) described “transnational networks” as influential on online language use, especially among migrants. In her study of online literacy practices among Chinese migrant youths in

the United States, Lam (2014) reported how they used multiple languages to manage transnational relationships between local immigrant community members and formal friends in China (see also, Lam, 2004, 2009; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009). Regarding the concept of “transnational spaces”, Jacquemet (2013) argued that digitally mediated environments can support the creation of a transnational space in which complex computer-mediated communication (CMC) practices recur simultaneously between local and virtual environments. Jacquemet elucidated that in such transitional spaces, communications among present and distant people are technologically mediated. He stressed that social networking platforms like Facebook enable the creation of transitional spaces at a personal networking level.

Lee (2017) considered “globalisation” when examining how globalised social media contributes to online multilingualism by bringing speakers of different languages into a shared digital space. She demonstrated how social media like Flickr and YouTube provide “translocal, interactional spaces” where people from all over the world engage with new translingual communicative practices and multilingual linguistic resources (Lee, 2017, p. 5). Given these theoretical insights, Zhao and Flewitt (2020) examined “translanguaging” conversations among children in Chinese immigrant families in a study of everyday language practices on WeChat (a Chinese social networking, messaging application). The findings revealed their engagement with multilingual and multimodal repertoires. In short, along with multimodality and popular culture, transnational communication is a factor that boosts learners’ motivation and increases accessibility to online resources for learning.

2.2.5 Language Learning Ecology and Affordances

Research adopting an “ecological approach” to understanding digital language learning is mostly derived from van Lier’s (2004, 2011) view on language and learning within the learner’s interaction with the environment. This research often employs the ecological concept of “affordance” – “what [the environment] offers” to an organism based on its need (Gibson, 1979, p. 127). In the realm of digital technology, Barton and Potts (2013) defined “digital affordances” as “possibilities for action which people identify in relation to specific resources” (p. 816). This implies that digital environments provide

linguistic, non-linguistic, and technological affordances that learners can perceive and act upon for language learning.

In research on “digital wilds” informal language learning, Godwin-Jones (2019) stressed that informal learning depends on the learner’s initiative and competence as well as the local conditions or ecologies. Regarding the concept of affordances, Reinhardt and Chen (2013) analysed a Chinese student’s social networking practices on Facebook and RenRen (a Chinese social networking application). They found that the student exercised her agency to act upon the affordances of social and symbolic activities by utilising features such as “status update posting” and “commenting”. Jin (2018) also examined the language learning potentials of WeChat’s technological resources based on data from two Mandarin language learners in the United States. She emphasised that language learning develops when environmental resources resonate with individual learners’ linguistic ability and agency. Moreover, Reinhardt (2019) reported on how game mechanics and features afford dynamic action potentials for language use, associating linguistic complexity and literacy opportunities with the coherent narratives contextualising the game’s design. Moreover, Newgarden and Zheng (2016) analysed the multiplayer video game, *World of Warcraft*, for its multimodal affordances for language learning. Their analysis combined an ecological perspective of language learning with dialogical relationships. They observed dynamic interactions emerging in communications during gameplay, suggesting that language learning involves interrelating with dynamics and symbols distributed within the online environment.

In short, the “ecological perspective of language learning” provides an overarching framework encompassing the other theoretical insights discussed above. It considers how learners exercise their agency to create opportunities; how ecologically dynamic, complex, and emergent the social media environment can be; and what kinds of affordances the environment offers and how they are related to literacies (languages) and multimodality. Aligned with the ideas of transnational networks and globalisation, the ecological perspective also examines interactive activities among users from dispersed locations and with diverse language backgrounds. For these reasons, this book builds on the ecological perspective of language learning as a starting point to develop a theoretical framework for research. Towards this aim, the theoretical reviews on how it can be developed to understand digital language learning are discussed at the end of this chapter.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Multimodal Media-Sharing Platforms

The following sections review studies on language learning through two multimodal media-sharing social media: Instagram and TikTok. The sections demonstrate how ways of learning are changing with technological developments on these platforms.

2.3.1 Instagram

Some studies of Instagram have invited language learners into the research space. For instance, in an exploratory study using an account created for research on Instagram (@memes_project), Purnama (2017) invited Indonesian English-language learners to create “memes” – images, texts, videos, or combination of all that are typically humorous in nature and which spread rapidly online. Purnama demonstrated how technological innovations used for meme creation provide affordances for language learning. This creative work not only supported student learning but also increased their motivation to learn. These findings suggest that users utilised the innovations strategically within their visual learning experience. Also using a created account to conduct research on Instagram (@instanarratives), Gomes Junior (2020) invited learners of various foreign languages into this online space to engage in “storytelling” about their language learning experiences. The participants (followers) connected with each other by sharing stories about learning a language via direct messages (DMs or private messages), posting images, writing captions, and commenting. The finding demonstrates how utilisation of these features facilitated users’ interactions within a global online network.

Other studies have focused on language learners’ creative uses of Instagram’s features to organise digital learning activities. For instance, in a study of Middle Eastern English-language learners’ use of Instagram, Al-Ali (2014) assigned the participants a task to post a photograph of something special each day during their vacation. This task demonstrated benefits for autonomous informal learning and its potential for incorporation into reflective classroom activities. Wulandari’s (2019) study of the influences of Instagram “vlogs” (video blogs) on speaking proficiency among Indonesian English-language learners also revealed improvements in their pronunciation and fluency. This result contributes to our understanding of how

language learners harness the multimodal affordances of technological innovations for learning diverse linguistic skills. In a study of the language learning affordances of Instagram and TikTok, Lee (2023) analysed how new features on the platforms are utilised as resources for foreign language learning based on four key dimensions of technological innovation: multimodality, mobility, instantaneous participation, and interactivity. She showed how language learners employ agency and creativity to perceive affordances for language learning in features not originally designed for this purpose. The findings of the studies above provide insights into how a user experience of online language learning is adaptive to technological innovations in emerging image-based social media.

2.3.2 TikTok

Recent studies have examined the use of TikTok for informal language practices. Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2023) demonstrated how Korean-language learners contributed to the creation of supportive environment for sharing learning experiences by responding to multimodal linguistic content in YouTube and TikTok comments. Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2022) also conducted a search of hashtags related to three target languages – #learnitalian, #learnchinese, and #learnrussian – to observe language learners’ daily discourse practices. The authors observed active content sharing around that the teaching of pronunciation and vocabulary. They reported that both video creators and commentators actively developed their identities as teachers or learners of the target language. This observation suggests that TikTok supports multilingual practices and identity work through its multimodal videos. In addition, Lee and Roger (2023) demonstrated how two English learners used TikTok’s features including “search”, “like”, and “save” to access and organise useful content based on their learning needs in daily-life situations.

Despite the lack of knowledge and systematic studies of language learning on TikTok, the studies reviewed above suggest that TikTok users can actively engage in video production directed at language learning and teaching. They also suggest that innovations in TikTok’s features (including features available in other applications such as Facebook but enhanced in TikTok in terms of increased accessibility) enable users to instantly engage and interact with digital content upon touching an icon. These insights highlight how TikTok’s innovations

facilitate mobile language learning in everyday life. They also indicate a need to re-approach the current state of digital social media such as TikTok present as an interesting space for research on mobile language learning via multimodal content creation and interaction.

2.4 Research Gaps and Research Questions

The literature review above identifies three main research gaps. Firstly, research has not kept pace with technological changes since the 2010s, resulting in limited investigation of popular multimodal media-sharing platforms like Instagram and TikTok and their technological affordances for language learning (Lee, 2023). This is problematic due to the lack of concrete examples illustrating creative and autonomous ways of learning, specifically through creating and sharing multimodal digital content. Moreover, we lack a clear understanding of the spatial dynamics of digital environments and their affordances to create digital spaces that facilitate interaction among users across physical boundaries. However, as a result of widespread globalised social media, the social context of online learning involves more spatially complex and dynamic networks. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how language learning occurs multimodally on these platforms in light of technological innovations that support the spatial affordances for learning a language.

Secondly, there is a scarcity of research on naturalistic contexts and experiential data resulting in a lack of understanding of how language learners incorporate digital learning into their lives. There is to date only a sparse body of research exploring learner perspectives on social media use in the language learning sphere (Benson & Chik, 2013; Han & Reinhardt, 2022; Jensen, 2019; Korobkova & Black, 2014; Lee & Roger, 2023; Sockett, 2014; Toffoli et al., 2023). To complement existing research, it is important to generate detailed data illustrating informal digital language learning by analysing both the platform and its users. Moreover, the spatial dimension integrating complex digital language learning with everyday life spaces remains under-explored. Taken together, there is a need for the investigation of informal digital language learning from a broader perspective of the individual learner's life.

Lastly, limited research has provided pedagogical guidelines to assist technology-mediated language learning, particularly regarding the use of visual and multimodal social media. Research on informal

language learning often does not include the provision to observe technology use in in-class learning contexts and how informal technology use helps students manage their academic study. However, it is important to better understand the role of social media in informal language learning and how teachers can connect formal, classroom learning to students' informal learning in their everyday lives. It is also needed to develop specific pedagogical strategies that can be directly applicable into language classrooms. To fill these research gaps, this book is guided by three research questions:

- (1) How does language learning occur through multimodal and spatial affordances on Instagram and TikTok?
- (2) How do language learners organise digital learning within their everyday-life spaces?
- (3) How can language teachers support learners' informal digital learning through reflective formal teaching?

2.5 Theoretical Framework: A Spatial Perspective on Technology Use for Language Learning

This section introduces the overarching theoretical framework employed in this book to explore social media and technology use for language learning. Building on Benson's (2021) concept of "a language learning environment" as the key term in the framework, this book employs "a spatial view" to investigate spaces where language learning occurs. The framework focuses on providing insights into experiences of social media and technology use for language learning from the perspective of *space*.

Drawing on the ecological perspectives of language learning (van Lier, 2004; 2011) as a starting point (as outlined in Section 2.2.5), the framework conceptualises "learning ecology" as "an environment" characterised by complex, dynamic, and emergent relations that generate learning experiences. The units of analysis in the framework include learning activities and learner agency that facilitate the organisation and arrangement of these activities. The framework also employs the ecological concept of "affordances" (Gibson, 1979) to identify the learning potentials of technological features in social media, particularly how language learners make use of these affordances for learning. Investigating the affordances would support identification of the multimodal aspects of digital platforms and

their impacts on language use and learning online. The complex and dynamic configuration of multiple modes of communication and their interrelations to emerge during the learning process are of interest as they can indicate how users organise their learning of specific language skills in response to the multimodal affordances supported by the platforms. This framework would be thus helpful to understanding the technological affordances of social media that connect people at distance and support the experience of foreign language learning on a global scale.

Benson (2021) emphasised the need to employ a spatial perspective to understand a learning environment. He argues that current ecological perspectives provide a strong account of *how* language learning occurs in the social context; that is, through interactions with the language among people who use that language. He also argues there is a lack of explanation on the spatiality of language learning; that is, *where* it takes place. Much of the work of digital language learning has been derived from van Lier's ecological account which did not really address *digital* environments. Although terms like "cyberspace" and "virtual space" are used metaphorically to describe the digital world in spatial terms (Meskill et al., 2012), the tendency for research to focus on physical spaces reflects a lack of awareness of the capacity of digital technology to create affordances and spaces for language learning by connecting global users across different geographies and linguistic backgrounds (Castells, 2010; Ciolfi, 2013; Jacquemet, 2013). For these reasons, this book applies a *spatial* perspective to understanding language learning and its environment, to offer a way to explore both physical and virtual spaces in a holistic and interconnected manner.

Scholars who adopt spatial perspectives on technology use for language learning have shown how digital media use connects diverse geographical and physical spaces, bringing dispersed global users into contact via digital platforms. Moores (2012) argued that habitual uses of settings and technology produce embodied experiences of place, which describe how people perceive and interact with their environment. He views *space* as socially produced through interactions between settings and human movement. He also explained that social interactions among media users are inevitably situated in geographies, with digital media intersecting and continuous with geographical spaces as part of social life. Dong and Blommaert (2016) employed the notion of scale, which defines social and geographical organisation

levels, to examine the intersections between national offline and global online language learning scales in Chinese middle-class identity development. The intersections showed how transnational practices and spatial repertoires are layered through virtual engagements with popular culture and physical mobilities across the globe. Castells (2016) conceptualised a “space of flows” (p. 229) – a digital network connecting global cities and places. He argued that these networked spaces depend on flows of interactions, transcending physical boundaries. Similarly, Jacquemet (2013) perceived a sense of spatial connectedness in transnational spaces where communications among local and distant individuals are mediated by technology. He stressed that social media communication enables the creation of personal, transnational communicative spaces. These spatial perspectives account for the space that connects different locations as well as the spatial dimensions that connects people on a global scale, thus bridging physical and digital worlds.

To better understand the spatial connectedness between physical and digital worlds in relation to language learning, the question arises: how do language learners’ uses of social media fit into their everyday uses of space? In a comprehensive examination of spatial perspectives on second language acquisition, Benson (2021) emphasised that digital resources are distributed in “the terrestrial world of language learning settings and environments” (p. 109). This viewpoint elucidates how the spatial circumstances in which language learners access digital resources with devices impact their learning. Benson (2021) stressed that these spatial circumstances are complex and varied according to “individual language learning environments” (p. 111) where individuals select resources and take learning actions based on their interests and needs. He explained that as learners move across physical spaces and access language resources on devices, their mobility shapes the circulation and accessibility of digital information. Here, various forms of social media are viewed as digital spaces where a language circulates and is learnt through digital interactions.

This conceptualisation of social media as spaces is related to the perception that information is contained within the device and is learnt on screen. Applying a spatial framework is thus to understand *where* language learners go to learn and use languages, with “going online” a matter of being in *a space*. The idea of a language learning environment conveys the sense of an individual learner going to a social media platform within and across various real-life spaces

where access is enabled by digital devices. Benson (2021) emphasised that the spaces and resources of a language learning environment (including both digital and physical spaces where learning occurs) act as a framework within which choices are made and actions are taken for learning.

Importantly, the underlying idea of *space* on the Internet is that a digital space organises geographical spaces on a global scale, creating possibilities for learning different languages over physical distances. A spatial perspective thus encompasses not only physical or geographical spaces, but also the production of digital spaces on a global scale in which a language is learnt through digital interaction and networking. In their research on “distributed” language learning in the wild, Hellermann and Thorne (2020) further discussed how language practices facilitated by digital technologies contribute to language learning in naturalistic, out-of-classroom settings. They stressed that these language practices create learning environments that interconnect physical and digital worlds.

Regarding these theoretical insights, case and narrative studies have demonstrated how individual learners incorporate technology use into everyday learning environments. For example, in an early case study of a Finnish English language learner’s everyday learning environment, Kuure (2011) demonstrated that the learner organised English learning in a home setting through daily uses of digital resources. The findings related to his online networks suggested that learning can be far-reaching between users across different geographical locations. In two narrative studies of second language learners at a Hong Kong university, Lai (2015, 2017) demonstrated how they utilised digital resources to seek an ecological balance while traversing in-class and out-of-class learning environments. In a multiple case study of three adult language learners in Hong Kong, Chik (2017) observed that they negotiated learning within their daily routines according to the affordances offered in different online and offline learning spaces. In addition, focusing on learner autonomy in “digital wilds”, Han and Reinhardt (2022) showed how three language learners each developed digital literacy-mediated identities as needed in various life-wide settings (e.g., work, education, home, social settings).

These studies reported that individual learners construct learning environments by organising a proliferation of digital resources and technologies within physical settings and life spaces. Collectively, the

spatial perspectives on digital language learning identified in these studies explain how individual learners cultivate language learning environments. In doing so, they access social media spaces within the physical spaces of their everyday lives where they experience and learn language use through digital devices.

Taken together, the spatial framework outlined above offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the integration of social media and technology use in everyday life. In this framework, a language learning environment comprises geographical and physical spaces where everyday life activities occur and where individuals use social media and technologies via mobile devices (Benson, 2023; Dong & Blommaert, 2016; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Moores, 2012; Thorne et al., 2021). It also includes digital spaces where learning interactions occur (Castells, 2016; Jacquemet, 2013). From a broader “learning” and “life” perspective, it offers a holistic understanding of how social media enables the creation of language learning environments that connect globally distant learners across physical and digital spaces. The spatial framework is thus applied to analyse these spaces as integral components of a language learning environment that involves engagement with both physical and digital realms.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed key areas of CALL research relevant to understanding informal digital language learning. It has emphasised a need to adopt a holistic view of learning in the life of an individual learner. The analysis of critical theoretical concepts and ideas in CALL research has identified the ecological view as a starting point for understanding informal digital language learning. To expand on existing knowledge in CALL, this literature review has identified the research questions and developed a spatial view as the theoretical framework to address them.

Throughout the rest of the book, I aim to explore the spatiality of the digital environment and its affordances for language learning in geographically remote and globally networked spaces. This exploration will focus on innovative ways of multimodal learning (RQ1, addressed in Chapter 3); how digital learning fits into learners’ everyday life spaces (RQ2, addressed in Chapter 4); and the integration of informal, everyday digital learning with formal, classroom teaching spaces (RQ3, addressed in both Chapters 3 and 4).

3 **Language Learning Affordances of Visual and Multimodal Social Networking**

A Comparative Study of Online Data of Social Media Posts on Instagram and TikTok

This chapter presents the findings from an analysis of public social media posts on TikTok and Instagram to address RQ1:

How does language learning occur through multimodal and spatial affordances?

The units of analysis include each platform's technological features and the ways in which users appropriate these features for language learning (Barton & Potts, 2013; van Lier, 2004). TikTok and Instagram provide new opportunities for language learning through multimodal content creation and networking (Gomes Junior, 2020; Lee, 2023, 2025a; Lee & Roger, 2023; Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2022, 2023). In addition, previous empirical studies reviewed in Chapter 2 have documented frequent vocabulary learning practices in social and recreational online spaces, particularly in relation to technological design and multimodal engagement (Benson, 2016; Jones et al., 2015; Lee, 2025a; Sundqvist, 2019). To expand on these studies, this chapter focuses on how users repurpose non-linguistic, non-educational, multimodal technological features as affordances for vocabulary learning.

Drawing on the ecological concept of affordances (Gibson, 1979; van Lier, 2004, 2011), this chapter examines how users leverage multimodal and spatial affordances on TikTok and Instagram for informal language learning. Specifically, it focuses on how multimodal aspects shape language learning experiences by providing interactive and visually engaging opportunities, and how users create, share, and engage with multimodal content by leveraging platform affordances to construct digital learning spaces. It further explores how social

networking and spatial affordances contribute to digital language learning, enabling global language exchanges across physical and virtual boundaries. Finally, this chapter offers pedagogical insights into how social media-based language learning strategies can be integrated into classroom settings. It explores how language teachers can incorporate multimodal, participatory, and networked learning approaches from platforms like TikTok and Instagram to address RQ3:

How can language teachers support learners' informal digital learning through reflective formal teaching?

3.1 Multimodal Affordances of Language Learning Online

Based on my prior analysis of the language learning affordances of TikTok and Instagram (Lee, 2023), this section will first briefly introduce their main features promoting multimodal communication and networking are briefly introduced. Both platforms support rich multimodality through image and photo editing features that enable users to convey meanings by integrating visual, textual, and auditory elements in their posts. TikTok specialises in short, self-made videos (up to three minutes). It is equipped with in-application video-editing tools such as adding background music, voiceovers, and sound effects; overlaying text, captions, and emojis on the video; converting a series of images into a video format; and applying filters and effects to modify the video background. While Instagram has introduced short video-sharing features through its “Stories” and “Reels” features (similar to the main feature of TikTok), it still primarily focuses on photo-sharing by offering various visual effects and filters. A single post can include up to 20 images in a carousel format, allowing viewers to swipe through the images on their screen. Instagram also permits users to upload externally created images.

According to Lee (2023), both platforms leverage algorithmic affordances that curate content and enhance user engagement, particularly through hashtag-driven discoverability. Hashtags such as #learnenglish and #englishvocabulary cluster content around specific language-learning interests. On TikTok, content is dynamically curated based on user behaviour (e.g., watch time, likes, shares, comments, and replays) and trending topics (e.g., #languagechallenge comparing different British and American accents or practising difficult pronunciations). This algorithmic system enables creators to achieve content virality,

reaching diverse audiences beyond immediate social networks (i.e., beyond followers). On Instagram, hashtags function as discovery tools, categorising posts to make them searchable within topic-based hashtag pages (e.g., #englishgrammar, #idioms, or #dailyvocabulary). Users can also follow specific hashtags to curate a personalised learning feed, ensuring consistent exposure to targeted language-learning content.

Based on the online dataset of public social media posts, the following sections illustrate how users identify and utilise multimodal innovations for language learning. The findings are structured around two key themes to emerge from the data:

- (1) pronunciation and speaking practice through TikTok's affordances, and
- (2) grammar and idiom learning through Instagram's affordances.

Both sections focus on how learner agency influences the articulation and appropriation of technological features to create affordances for language learning. The main objective is to explore how learners' creative engagement transforms or "repurposes" non-educational, social, and recreational resources for educational purposes. The sections also highlight the spatial affordances that enable global social networking, illustrating how social media facilitates language learning across geographic boundaries.

3.1.1 TikTok: Pronunciation and Speaking Practice through Auditory and Visual Affordances

TikTok videos enable dynamic, real-time interactions through multi-modal content, integrating synchronised audio, pop-up text, and visual overlays via in-app editing features. The analysis revealed that these affordances encourage users to create content demonstrating language skills such as pronunciation and speaking. Captions and hashtags also help content to reach a broad user audience.

Figure 3.1 is a TikTok post featuring an English language instructor demonstrating the difference between the voiced /z/ and voiceless /s/ sounds. The creator uses audio-visual pairing to help learners distinguish the two phonemes, with word pairs such as:

- /z/ sounds: "eyes", "phase", "plays", "prize", "lose", "rise", and
- /s/ sounds: "ice", "face", "place", "price", "loose", "rice".

The words are visually organised into two categories, with pop-up text appearing as each word is pronounced. This synchronisation enables viewers to connect auditory input with written text in real-time. The creator also shows mouth movements and facial cues to demonstrate airflow and to reinforce phonetic accuracy. Phonetic transcriptions overlay spoken words, clarifying pronunciation distinctions. The caption, “Listen closely!” also draws viewers’ attention towards the sounds.

In addition, hashtags including #english and #pronunciation ensure that the content is categorised and surfaced to relevant learners through TikTok’s algorithm. Viewer comments such as “I’ve always struggled with the difference between ‘s’ and ‘z’ sounds. This makes it so clear!”, and “I’ve been practising this sound several times and now it feels much easier to say” suggest that viewers actively replicate the pronunciation patterns and benefit from ongoing exposure. Requests such as “Can you cover ‘th’ sounds next?” indicate how the creator’s content might lead to further interactions and learning. Comments such as “I wasn’t even looking for pronunciation lessons, but this popped up. So helpful!” show how the platform’s algorithm surfaced content to users who were not actively searching for pronunciation tips yet still found them valuable.

Figure 3.1 illustrates how TikTok’s multimodal affordances enhance an immersive, interactive pronunciation learning experience. These affordances allow learners to process pronunciation distinctions in real-time through visual, auditory, and interactive modes. The platform’s algorithm amplified engagement by surfacing content to users beyond those actively searching for pronunciation tips. This hashtag-driven discoverability creates spatial affordances that facilitate global networking, connecting users with diverse linguistic backgrounds. The immediate accessibility of multimodal content enables users to engage in language teaching and learning, transcending geographical barriers. Furthermore, learner agency is evident in the comments, as viewers actively participated by practising pronunciation and asking follow-up questions. This post thus reflects how TikTok’s multimodal, interactive, and algorithmically-driven affordances foster a learning environment where users contribute to content production and interact with a global audience.

Another category of TikTok posts includes content designed to encourage learners to expand their spoken vocabulary by leveraging the platform’s multimodal affordances – through the post itself, and

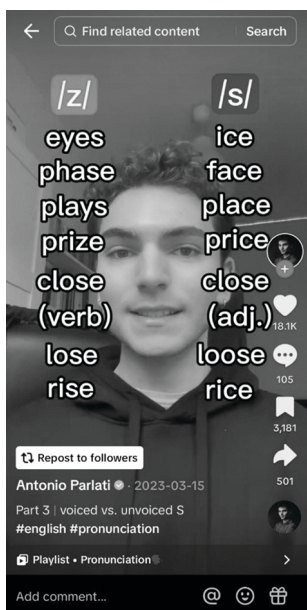


Figure 3.1 A TikTok Post Comparing the Voiced /z/ and Voiceless /s/ Sounds.

through collaborative comments – to reinforce meaning, enhance retention, and promote contextual practice. Figure 3.2, for instance, is a TikTok post introducing various ways to express fatigue in spoken English. The creator offers alternatives to the commonly overused phrase, “I’m tired”. Importantly, the video incorporates contextual explanations, demonstrating the appropriate usage of each expression in different situations. The 80-second video is structured into four segments designed to introduce, explain, and encourage viewer participation:

- (1) (0:00–0:07) The video begins with bold text, “Don’t always say ‘I’m tired’” with the red cross emoji (✖). The creator shakes his head and crosses his arms to emphasise the message. He says, “Don’t always say ‘I’m tired’ in English. Here are some alternatives that you can use to be more expressive in your future conversations.” Auto-captions transcribe the speech.

(2) (0:08–0:70) The creator introduces alternative expressions, each accompanied by contextual explanations and example sentences to illustrate usage:

- “I’m spent” and “I’m beat” – He says, “Same vibes with these two.” He dramatises fatigue, saying, “Far out, I am totally spent after the day we’ve had.”, and ‘Wow, I’m beat, and I don’t know why.”
- “I’m shattered” – He explains, “This is for when you are extremely tired or just exhausted.” with an example, “I didn’t sleep well last night, and I am feeling shattered today.” He also corrects pronunciation, stating, “It’s ‘shattered’, not ‘shitted’.”
- “I’m running out of energy” – He continues, “This is a great one that you can use because it’s quite polite and it just lets people know that you’re starting to feel tired, and at some point, you’re going to have no energy left.”
- “I can barely keep my eyes open” – He mimics heavy eyelids while saying, “This one is when you are so tired that your eyes are literally starting to close and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Throughout the video, the creator uses facial expressions and tone to demonstrate how each phrase conveys different levels of fatigue. The phrases appear in pop-up text overlays, with different colours used to emphasise key words. These multimodal elements enhance comprehension by pairing auditory, visual, and textual reinforcements.

(3) (0:71–0:80) The creator actively encourages participation by concluding with the question, “What other ways can we say ‘I’m tired’ in English? Add your suggestions to the comments below and follow me for more English lessons.”

By explicitly inviting viewers to contribute suggestions and engage in discussion, the creator promotes sustained interactions within a dedicated learning community. The comments section reveals active engagement in spoken vocabulary expansion, as users constructed example sentences, sought clarification, and provided peer feedback. For instance, one viewer asks, “I’m drained after studying for my exams all night! Is this correct?”, to which the creator responds, “Yes! That’s perfect. You could also say, ‘I’m exhausted’ for a stronger emphasis.” Another user inquires, “Can we say, ‘I’m racked’?”, prompting the

creator to reply, “That’s a great option! But very informal. Use it with friends.”

Interestingly, peer-to-peer exchanges also emerged where learners independently answered each other’s questions, reinforcing a self-sustaining learning network. In one exchange, a user asks: “Can we say, ‘I’m wiped out’?”, and another responds, “You can! It’s a great way to say you’re completely exhausted, especially after a long day or intense activity.” Users also reflect on pragmatic use, evaluating how expressions fit different social and professional contexts. One viewer asks, “Is ‘I’m shattered’ too informal for work settings?”, leading another to clarify, “Yes, ‘I’m exhausted’ would sound more professional.” These discussions demonstrate the exercise of strong learner agency as users actively assess the real-world applicability of new phrases. The exchanges also highlight TikTok’s affordance as a collaborative learning space where knowledge is co-constructed.

Figure 3.2 shows how multimodal affordances support the scaffolding of knowledge presented in the content. The post structures learning through direct prompts, guided practice, and interactive call-to-action phrases, encouraging learners to acquire and practise new expressions in contextually appropriate ways. The interactive features such as comment-driven discussions and direct creator engagement reinforce learner agency by allowing users to request clarification and contribute variations of expressions. In terms of spatial affordances, TikTok functioned as a learner-driven space where language learning is shaped by collaboration in comments. The creator in Figure 3.1 leverages hashtags to extend algorithmic reach, ensuring that his lesson surfaced for users actively searching for English improvement. The creator in Figure 3.2, however, fosters a sustained, community-driven interaction where discussion emerges within a network of dedicated learners. These discussions demonstrate the exercise of learner agency as users actively construct knowledge through participatory dialogue.

In summary, the examples above reveal how TikTok’s video-based multimodal affordances support pronunciation and spoken lexical expansion. The findings highlight TikTok’s role in shaping an interactive, participatory language-learning environment where learners take an active role in knowledge construction, facilitated by multimodal engagement and global networking.

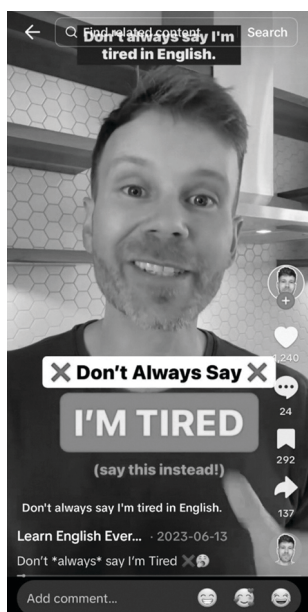


Figure 3.2 A TikTok Post Introducing Various Ways to Say ‘I’m tired’.

3.1.2 Instagram: Grammar and Idiom Learning through Visual and Textual Affordances

Instagram’s image posts highlight how visual and textual elements facilitate vocabulary retention, grammar learning, and idiomatic expression acquisition. The posts often feature graphics, charts, or tables to categorise information and reinforce memorisation through structured layouts and text. Users can also add captions and hashtags to provide additional context and explanations. These features make Instagram particularly useful for learning language structures and expanding lexical knowledge.

Figure 3.3 presents an Instagram post that leverages the carousel format – which enables users to swipe through multiple images in one post – to facilitate structured, progressive grammar instruction on the “gerund” and “infinitive verb” forms. The post consists of four image

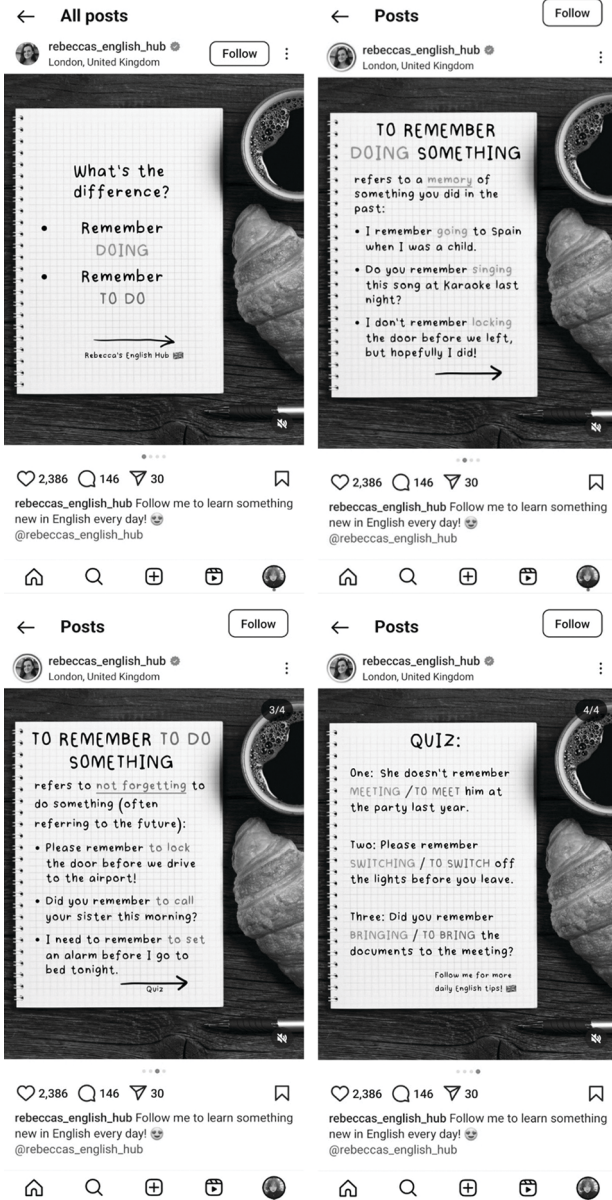


Figure 3.3 A Carousel Instagram Post Explaining ‘Infinitive’ and ‘Gerund’ Verb Forms with Examples and a Quiz.

slides, each designed to serve a specific pedagogical function. To promote continued and active engagement, an arrow (→) symbol is used to lead to the next slide. The first slide introduces the focus of the lesson: the distinction between “remember doing” and “remember to do”. The question written in text, “What’s the difference?”, serves as a prompt, guiding users toward a deeper exploration of the verb forms. The second slide details the use of “remember doing” in the context of recalling “a memory of something you did in the past” through the following examples:

- “I remember going to Spain when I was a child.”,
- “Do you remember singing this song at Karaoke last night?”, and
- “I don’t remember locking the door before we left, but hopefully I did!”

The third slide contrasts this usage with “remember to do”, which is explained as referring to an intention or the act of “not forgetting to do something in the future”. This form is illustrated through the following examples:

- “Please remember to lock the door before we drive to the airport!”,
- “Did you remember to call your sister this morning?”, and
- “I need to remember to set an alarm before I go to bed tonight.”

These examples demonstrate the difference between the two forms; that is, “remember doing” focuses on past experiences, whereas “remember to do” directs attention to actions to be completed in the future. The coloured text in two forms visually helps with pattern recognition and retention. The final slide features a quiz designed to reinforce learning through practical application. The quiz invites learners to choose the correct verb form based on the given contexts:

- “She doesn’t remember meeting/to meet him at the party last year.”
- “Please remember switching/to switch off the lights before you leave.”
- “Did you remember bringing/to bring the documents to the meeting?”

This quiz acts as an interactive component, encouraging learners to actively engage with the content and to solidify their understanding.

In addition, the post's caption provides further explanation: "To remember to do vs. to remember doing is important to learn as the meaning changes depending on whether it's in the infinitive form or the '-ing' form!" This caption reinforces the instructional intent of the post and prompts self-reflection. The conversational tone enhanced with emojis such as the thinking face (🤔) and the smiling face with heart-eyes (😍), makes the content approachable and engaging.

Hashtags such as #grammartips, #grammarlesson, and #learnenglish invite a global audience of learners seeking English grammar content. The learners respond to the quiz in the comments by sharing answers, asking follow-up questions, or seeking clarification regarding correct use of verb forms. One comment noted, "I think 'meeting' is correct because we are referring to the memory of meeting him last year." The creator validated this reasoning, stating, "Yes, 'meeting' is the correct form, as it reflects the past event that the speaker recalls." Another user expressed confusion, stating, "The third one is confusing. It seems to refer to the intention of the action but uses the past tense 'did'." The creator addressed this by explaining, "Good question! In this case, 'to bring' is correct because the sentence is referring to an action that needs to be remembered in the future, even though it is framed in a past context. 'Bringing' would only be appropriate if the focus were on recalling an action that had already occurred." These creator responses effectively reinforce the grammatical distinctions and validate the learners' contributions, helping to solidify their understanding of correct verb forms in various contexts.

Figure 3.3 thus demonstrates how users facilitate structured, networked grammar learning by leveraging Instagram's spatial affordances, particularly in the carousel format and the comment section. The carousel format spatially structures grammar instruction across slides, allowing step-by-step learning through pattern recognition and contextual application. Unlike single-image posts that provide a brief snapshot of information, the carousel layout facilitates self-paced engagement, ensuring learners absorb key concepts before applying them in the quiz. Furthermore, the comment section serves as an evolving, community-driven learning space, making language learning a collaborative and socially-supported process.

Figure 3.4 is another carousel Instagram post scaffolding idiomatic learning by guiding learners from definition to contextualisation through text-based explanations. The post consists of three image slides, each designed to serve a specific pedagogical function: presenting the

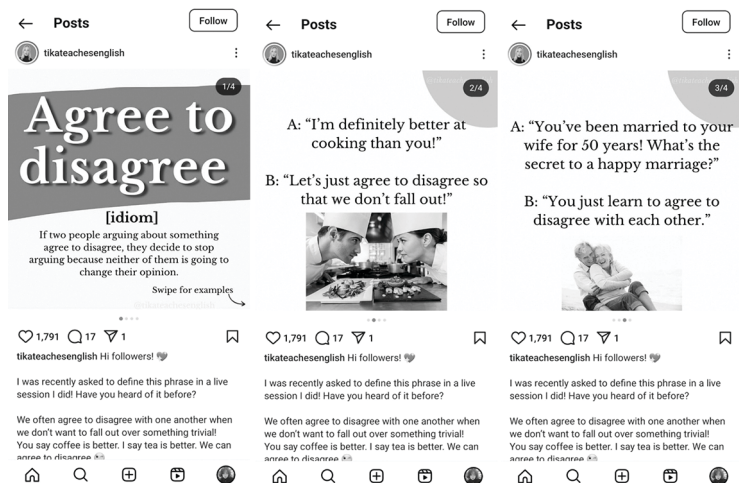


Figure 3.4 A Carousel Instagram Post on the Idiom ‘Agree to Disagree’ with Examples.

definition of an idiom, illustrating its use in real-world dialogue, and encouraging interactive engagement. This structure ensures a progressive and immersive learning experience beyond static memorisation. The post begins with an introductory slide featuring the idiom “agree to disagree” in a dictionary-style definition, explaining that it describes a situation where people acknowledge differing views without resolving the disagreement. The phrase, “Swipe for examples” paired with an arrow icon encourages users to engage actively. This slide thus establishes a foundational understanding, enhances readability, and encourages engagement.

The second slide illustrates the idiom in a disagreement dialogue between two chefs, with one claiming to be a better cook and the other responding, “Let’s just agree to disagree so that we don’t fall out!” Accompanying this exchange is an image of two chefs in a competitive stance, reinforcing the idiom’s role in de-escalating disagreements without conceding a point. The combination of visual cues and textual examples strengthens comprehension by embedding the idiom in a professional skill-driven setting. The third slide demonstrates how the idiom can be applied into an everyday interaction. A dialogue

exchange features a scenario in which someone asks, “You’ve been married for 50 years! What’s the secret to a happy marriage?”, to which the other person responds, “You just learn to agree to disagree with each other.” The visual accompanying this slide depicting a couple laughing together illustrates use of the idiom in personal relationships. Reinforcing engagement, the caption extends the learning experience beyond the post itself. It provides an everyday example, “You say coffee is better. I say tea is better. We can agree to disagree! 😊”, which demonstrates usage of the idiom in a more informal context. The inclusion of a winking emoji also contributes to a conversational tone, making idiomatic learning feel more engaging and accessible.

The comment section enhances interactivity as users apply the idiom in personalised contexts and seek clarification on its usage. Comments include, “I always argued with my friend about which football team was better! I guess we just agreed to disagree!”, and “Whenever I talk with my dad about politics, we always end up agreeing to disagree.” The creator participates in the conversations, validating learner contributions, clarifying formal and informal usage, and providing additional examples. The creator responds, “This expression is often informal, but can work in formal contexts if it’s about respectful disagreement.” In addition, users also compare it to equivalent expressions in their languages; for example, a Spanish user shared, “In Spanish, we say ‘Dejémoslo estar’ or ‘No llegamos a un acuerdo’, which means let’s leave it that way or let it go.” This comparison enriches further discussion, highlighting the cross-linguistic connections. Through such exchanges, learning becomes a co-constructed process, shaped by real-world application and collective interpretation. The global networking capabilities of Instagram further enriches the learning experience. The post reaches a broader language-learning community through hashtags such as #englishidioms, #learnenglish, and #englishvocabulary which ensures wider discoverability.

Figure 3.4 shows that Instagram’s spatial affordances structure idiomatic learning into an engaging, interactive experience. The carousel format sequences information across multiple slides, guiding learners through progressive knowledge-building rather than presenting everything at once. The swipe-based format encourages sustained engagement, allowing learners to progress through theoretical, professional, and personal contexts. Similar to the previous examples in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, the comment section gathers global

users into a shared discussion space, where they exchange insights, negotiate meaning, and refine understanding.

In summary, the examples above demonstrate how Instagram's visual, textual, and interactive affordances transform grammar, and idiomatic expression learning into a structured and socially co-constructed process. By leveraging the carousel format to scaffold information, interactive comment discussions to facilitate peer learning, and hashtag-driven discoverability to expand networked learning, the posts ensure that learning is contextually grounded and globally connected.

3.2 Repurposing Social Media as Language Learning Spaces: Towards More Multimodal, Creative, and Spatially-Connected Global Interactions

Based on the analysis of online data collected from TikTok and Instagram, this chapter has demonstrated how informal language learning occurs through the creative appropriation of platform affordances. Users appropriated non-educational and non-linguistic multimodal features as language learning affordances, transforming the platforms into dynamic, informal digital language learning environments. Previous research has acknowledged the self-initiated CALL activities undertaken by learners outside the classroom in a range of social and recreational digital spaces within the fields of MALL (Godwin-Jones, 2019), EE (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), OILE (Toffoli et al., 2023), IDLE (Soyoof et al., 2023), and the digital wilds (Sauro & Zourou, 2019). The study reported in this chapter adds to this line of research by providing insights into how language learning occurs in digital spaces and how it is changing with technological innovations. These findings enhance understanding of autonomous, creative digital language learning.

The findings also contribute to our understanding of the current phenomenon of visual and multimodal social networking for language learning that has hitherto received limited attention in CALL research. Importantly, the spatial perspective employed in this book highlights the language learners' experiences of global and digital spaces, beyond physical spaces. This is a point of focus not previously addressed in ecological accounts, although it aligns with some aspects of learning ecology in which language and learning are viewed to occur through socialisation (van Lier, 2004, 2011).

3.2.1 Interdependence of Affordance, Agency, and Creativity in Multimodal Digital Language Learning

This study expands the scope of previous analyses of social media use for language learning by applying the concept of affordances to analyse the technological features and the articulation of their usage for language learning (Lee, 2023, 2025a). Drawing on Gibson's (1979) definition of affordances as "what [the environment] offers" (p. 127), this study examines directly what technological features on TikTok and Instagram can "do" for language learning and how users make use of these affordances. The analysis especially demonstrates that learning depends greatly on learner agency to "act upon" technological features not designed for language learning. This study thus supports van Lier's (2004, 2011) recognition of agency as an inseparable characteristic of learning action, in line with research acknowledging the role of agency in digital language learning (Benson, 2016; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Jin, 2018; Lee & Roger, 2023; Reinhardt, 2019; Reinhardt & Chen, 2013).

One of the key findings of this study is that technology use in digital language learning is associated not only with "agency" or "action", but also with "creativity". Previous studies drawing on an ecological perspective have conceptualised affordances as available possibilities to be acted upon (Barton & Lee, 2013; Barton & Potts, 2013). However, this study reveals how users actively reconfigure or generate new affordances for educational purposes. For example, the TikTok video in Figure 3.1 layers phonetic transcriptions and mouth shape demonstrations to create engaging audiovisual learning experiences. Furthermore, the Instagram carousel post in Figure 3.3 visually scaffolds grammar through colour-coded overlays, emoji cues, and linguistic comparisons. These examples reflect a more agentive "designer" role through which users innovate with entertainment-oriented features and transform them into pedagogical tools.

The reconceptualising of "digital agency" – as not only responsive but generative – enhances our understanding of the user's role in the creative appropriation of platform features to develop personalised, multimodal learning on content-sharing platforms. In this sense, this study expands the "complex and dynamic systems" theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) by demonstrating how users interact with their social media environment and actively reshape learning

spaces. This interaction highlights the non-linear, emergent nature of informal digital language learning processes, emphasising how learner agency influences the ongoing evolution of the learning environment (Sockett, 2013; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012). Although prior studies have highlighted the educational potential of TikTok and Instagram (Gomes Junior, 2020; Leier, 2018; Vázquez-Calvo et al., 2022, 2023), the findings of this study go further by showing how users act as ‘designers’ of complex, interactive multimodal digital literacy.

This study thus enriches the semiotic understanding of digital language learning, extending van Leeuwen’s (2004) socio-semiotic theory. It also advances earlier work on digital literacies (Androutsopoulos, 2013; Barton & Lee, 2013; Benson, 2016; Hafner et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Zappavigna, 2015, 2019) by demonstrating how informal, learner-driven practices involve both new ways of reading and writing, and the orchestration of multimodal semiotic resources in socially situated, creative learning acts. It therefore offers new insight into the nature of learning affordances in contemporary, multimodal content-sharing spaces, where learners’ innovative participation both shapes and enables personalised learning pathways.

3.2.2 Spatial Affordances: Global Networking and Transcending Boundaries

Another key finding is that the spatial affordances of TikTok and Instagram support globally networked, transnational language learning. This is particularly evident in how creators strategically use hashtags such as #learnenglish, #pronunciation, #grammartips, and #englishidioms to enhance the discoverability of their posts. By leveraging platform algorithms and tagging practices, they intentionally extend the reach of their content to language learners across geographic and linguistic boundaries. These findings highlight how digital visibility and audience engagement are co-constructed through platform-specific affordances, facilitating informal language learning within globalised, participatory networks.

Earlier studies have primarily examined communication between users across two nations, where transnational interaction was shaped by pre-existing social or diasporic family networks (Lam, 2014; Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). However, this study reveals a more natural, learner-driven form of spatial engagement where users independently navigate

social media environments to connect with dispersed, like-minded language learners. These interactions are enabled through affordances such as hashtags and algorithmic recommendations, which foster interest-based, translocal learning networks, advancing Jacquemet's (2013) notion of transnational communicative space.

This study further shows how learners construct and sustain global networks through platform features and engagement practices. Hashtags function not merely as textual markers but as spatial tools that position content within searchable, algorithmically clustered communities. These algorithmically driven flows generate emergent learning spaces where learners engage with peer-informed content, ask questions, exchange idioms, and co-construct meaning. While supporting Castells' (2016) emphasis on a "space of flows" of information across geographies, this study advances his framework by offering a micro-level perspective on how individual users strategically shape personalised, asynchronous learning pathways through interaction with platform algorithms. It foregrounds learner agency in configuring spatial connections through participatory practices such as hashtagging, curating content, and engaging in translocal dialogue. In doing so, it redefines "digital spatiality" not only in terms of geographic reach but as a semiotic and participatory process in which visibility, interaction, and meaning-making are dynamically shaped through multimodal engagement.

By adopting a spatial lens to enrich Benson's (2021) idea of "language learning environment", the findings show that learners not only inhabit digital spaces but actively configure and personalise these spaces using the social media platform's algorithmic and interactive affordances. This study thus reveals how learners reshape their learning environments through socially situated, learner-initiated practices that transcend physical and digital boundaries.

3.3 Pedagogical Implications

Building on the findings and discussions presented in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, this section outlines the pedagogical implications supported by concrete classroom strategies drawn directly from observed practices on social media. The primary aim of outlining these implications is to support language teachers to bridge informal and formal learning contexts.

3.3.1 Pedagogical Strategy 1: Building Digital Genre Awareness through Social Media Curation and Comparison

One strategy is for language teachers to support students to develop an awareness of how social media formats support language learning through platform-specific multimodal features. This strategy aims to encourage students to critically examine how creators combine visual, textual, and auditory elements to convey meaning, and how platform structures such as hashtags and algorithms influence content visibility and reach. For example, teachers might organise a “social media learning gallery” where students collect different types of language-focused content. Such content may include a TikTok video that demonstrates pronunciation through close-up articulation and captions, and an Instagram carousel that introduces idioms using illustrations and contextualised sentences. Students can then analyse the multimodal elements such as voiceovers, text overlays, emoji, camera angles, or slide sequencing and explain how the features support language comprehension.

To consider spatial awareness, teachers may also ask students to reflect on how they discover relevant posts (e.g., through hashtags or followed accounts), what types of language learning content they encounter due to algorithmic recommendations, and how these patterns may differ among individuals. In addition, they may consider whether the content is locally or globally targeted, and how such dynamics influence their exposure to diverse cultural references. A follow-up task may include writing a short comparison between a video-based and image-based post, focusing on which modes are most effective for achieving particular language learning goals such as learning pronunciation, vocabulary, or pragmatic expressions. This strategy would foster multimodal awareness, promote critical engagement with platform structures, and assist students to become more intentional in how they interact with and evaluate informal digital learning content across social media networks.

3.3.2 Pedagogical Strategy 2: Designing Interactive Pronunciation Practice Inspired by TikTok Posts

Drawing on the findings on TikTok’s affordances for pronunciation learning through audiovisual demonstrations, teachers may incorporate into the learning programme interactive pronunciation activities

modelled on social media formats. For example, students might create short pronunciation clips that imitate the TikTok format, focusing on difficult phonemes, intonation patterns, or stress placement. In class, teachers may model a video that uses minimal pairs (e.g., “rice vs. rise”; “beat vs. bit”; “ship vs. sheep”; “full vs. fool”; and “seat vs. sit”) with visible mouth movements and phonetic transcription. Students might then work in pairs to record their own versions using school-provided tablets or their own devices. Teachers might also set up a class social media account, requiring students to upload clips for peer review and to present their postings in the classroom for further discussion. (Note: social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram allow users to create private accounts accessible only by approved followers.) Discussions may be encouraged around the effectiveness of different multimodal strategies; for example, which gestures, visual cues, or speech patterns were most helpful.

In addition, teachers might organise a “pronunciation challenge week” during which each student selects a commonly mispronounced word (e.g., salmon, February, Wednesday, quinoa, choir, debt, and subtle) and produces a video explaining its correct pronunciation, including phonetic breakdown and example sentences. These videos might be shared on a classroom channel using Padlet or Google Classroom, followed by peer feedback sessions. Students might also add a short comment reflecting on the feedback they received and how it influenced their pronunciation practice. Assessment criteria might include clarity of explanation, accuracy of usage, and creative multimodal design.

Furthermore, to introduce a spatial dimension, teachers might encourage students to explore pronunciation videos from different English-speaking regions and observe how regional variations (e.g., Australian, American, and British English) are presented and explained. This comparison exercise would promote awareness of diverse global Englishes and foster sensitivity to pronunciation variation in real-world contexts. By engaging with diverse pronunciation models and leveraging peer networks, these exercises would therefore reinforce oral accuracy, learner agency, and globally relevant communicative competence.

3.3.3 Pedagogical Strategy 3: Leveraging Instagram Carousels to Teach Grammar and Idioms

The findings show that Instagram carousels often structure content visually across slides to explain grammar points or idiomatic

expressions. Teachers may adopt this affordance by asking students to create their own grammar or idiom carousels, either digitally or in print format using flashcards. For instance, a lesson on phrasal verbs might begin with a teacher-led analysis of a sample Instagram post that visually distinguishes the meanings of phrasal verbs. Students might then select a phrasal verb and build a three-slide carousel that includes

- verb definition (Slide 1),
- example sentences or a dialogue using the verb (Slide 2), and
- a quiz question (Slide 3).

Similarly, lessons might cover other grammar rules such as verb tenses (e.g., “past vs. present perfect vs. present perfect continuous”) and complex sentences using subordinating conjunctions (e.g., “although”; “since”; “as”; “because”

; “when”; “after”). These carousels might then be compiled into a class library, used for revision, or shared on a classroom Instagram account. This creative content production activity would encourage students to engage with grammar knowledge productively, enhancing their understanding and retention.

To teach idiomatic expressions, students might be encouraged to investigate idioms from various English-speaking countries and highlight cultural or regional variations in meaning or usage. For example, students might compare expressions “and use carousel slides to explain the idioms in context. This activity would highlight the transnational diversity of English and how social media enables exposure to regional variation. To make the activity more dynamic, teachers might run an “idiom gallery walk” where students design carousel-style posters on A4 sheets, each explaining a different idiom (e.g., “spill the beans”, “hit the hay”, “call it a day”, “and bite the bullet”) embedded with a quiz question. The posters might be displayed on the classroom walls, and students can walk around in pairs and answer quiz questions. Afterwards, they might vote on which idioms are explained most clearly and creatively. This activity integrates visual design, cultural exploration, and collaborative learning, which reinforces students’ deeper retention. For a digital extension, teachers might also ask students to design their carousels using Canva or Google Slides and upload them to a class learning platform for asynchronous peer feedback. Importantly, such activities encourage spatial

awareness as students engage with visual content in both physical and digital spaces, fostering a dynamic learning environment.

3.3.4 Pedagogical Strategy 4: Facilitating Peer Interaction and Collaborative Meaning-Making

Given the evidence of collaborative learning in the peer-to-peer interactions in the comments, teachers might recreate this collaborative learning space through structured class forums or peer feedback sessions. Teachers might ask students to analyse a TikTok or Instagram post during class and to write example sentences using a target expression or language point. Students might then post their sentences on a shared online document or collaborative platform (e.g., Padlet) where they can respond, correct, and expand upon each other's contributions. This exercise would foster active engagement and peer-supported language development.

To further simulate online interaction, teachers might implement a “digital comment thread simulation” where each student posts an original comment explaining an expression (e.g., “I’m beat”). Peers might then respond with example sentences (e.g., “After my 12-hour shift, I was absolutely shattered”) or related expressions (e.g., “I’m drained;”, or “I’m wiped out”). Teachers may add clarifications such as tone or cultural nuance; for instance, they might note that “I’m shattered” is more common in Britain, whereas “I’m beat” is more common in America. Teachers might also assign rotating roles such as “language coach”, “accuracy checker”, or “tone advisor” to structure interaction and feedback. In a follow-up class discussion, students might reflect on how the threads mimic real-world meaning-making in global comment sections. This structure would foster participatory learning within globally dispersed communities and build pragmatic competence and feedback literacy. Additionally, students might analyse real public comment threads under viral language-learning posts to observe how global users clarify, question, or remix expressions. This would deepen their understanding of how spatially distributed audiences engage in collaborative learning and negotiation of meaning.

3.3.5 Pedagogical Strategy 5: Creating and Curating Social Media-Inspired Content Using Hashtags and Discovery Tools

A key spatial affordance highlighted in this chapter is the role of hashtags and algorithmic recommendations in enabling users to

discover content and form interest-based, transnational learning networks. Teachers may use this insight by asking students to experiment with tagging and discoverability as part of content creation. For example, students might create a TikTok-style video or Instagram post on a language topic and test different hashtag combinations (e.g., #learnenglish, #dailyvocabulary, #englishidioms) to explore how hashtags shape audience and reach. As part of a “hashtag learning lab”, students might explore the top 5 hashtags used for English learners on Instagram and TikTok, analyse the types of content appearing under each one, and discuss how algorithmic visibility affects language exposure. Teachers might also guide students collaboratively, curating a shared digital library of favourite posts under topic-specific hashtag folders (e.g., #englishgrammar, #speaklikeanative). Through this process, learners would come to understand how transnational learning flows are shaped by digital infrastructures and how they can strategically position their content within global language-learning communities. In addition, students would reflect on the geographical origins of posts they collect (when identifiable), helping them to recognise how language use, slang, or cultural context may vary across regions, bringing an additional spatial dimension to their digital curation.

Collectively, these five strategies encourage critical, creative, and collaborative language learning while embracing the multimodal and participatory nature of contemporary digital spaces. I trust that these applications will assist teachers to connect with learners who are interested in, or already familiar with, the uses of multimodal media-sharing platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has explored how informal language learning occurs on social media by analysing public TikTok and Instagram posts. Through an examination of multimodal content, it has demonstrated how visual, textual, and audio elements support learners to build vocabulary, improve pronunciation, acquire grammar knowledge, and understand idioms, thus addressing RQ1. This chapter also investigated how spatial and algorithmic features influence the discoverability and transnational reach of language learning content. By identifying participatory practices such as commenting, content creation, and hashtagging, it illustrated how learners engage in informal learning across globally dispersed digital spaces and form interest-based

learning networks. In response to RQ3, the chapter concluded by outlining five pedagogical strategies that translate these findings into actionable classroom practices. These strategies show how language teachers can bridge informal and formal learning by incorporating digital practices into classroom teaching.

4 Language Learning Experiences with Everyday Social Media Uses

A Multiple Case Study on Ethnographic Data of Users’ Narratives

A multiple-case study of five international students learning English in Australia was conducted using narrative data gathered from their journal entries, stimulated recall interviews, and social media posts. This chapter reports the findings on their digital learning experiences to address RQ2:

How do language learners organise digital learning within their everyday-life spaces?

As noted in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), language learning can occur in a range of everyday life spaces, especially for students studying a language overseas in countries like Australia, where they would encounter language use and learning opportunities (Benson, 2021). The findings reported in Chapter 3 have demonstrated language-related learning content and activities organised through access to mobile applications. In particular, advances in mobile screen technology that displays digital content indicate the affordances of mobile devices that support easier and quicker user engagement with digital content on the move. This points to the importance of further investigation of users’ experiences of mobile language learning across diverse everyday life spaces. As such, this chapter provides insights into users’ experiences and perspectives on informal mobile digital language learning in everyday life.

Applying Benson’s (2021) concept of a “language learning environment” (see Chapter 2), this chapter endeavours to explore the ways in which the uses of digital media and mobile technologies fit into everyday uses of space. The aim is to enhance understanding of how language

learners organise informal, digital-based language learning by expanding the learning context beyond the classroom into a wider environment of an individual learner's everyday life spaces. Another aim is to show how users' engagement with digital technology in life can shape or change their attitudes toward language learning. This chapter also discusses the pedagogical implications of the reported findings in regard to how language teachers can foster the practical application of everyday language learning through strategic classroom tasks, to address RQ3:

How can language teachers support learners' informal digital learning through reflective formal teaching?

4.1 Moving Between Two Worlds: Everyday Access to Digital Resources and Language Learning

This section explores five themes that emerged from the data analysis to describe how students utilise Instagram and TikTok to integrate digital language learning into everyday uses of *space*:

- (1) saving and reviewing useful digital content in different settings and places,
- (2) searching for new linguistic information encountered in in-place interactions,
- (3) perceiving a sense of mobility and spatial presence through digital content,
- (4) creating digital content to reflect on learning experiences in space, and
- (5) a conceptual change of the relationship between digital learning and everyday life spaces.

These integration methods illustrate how students construct language learning environments using social media affordances in accordance with spatial circumstances and personal learning interests and needs.

4.1.1 Integration 1: Saving and Reviewing Digital Content in Different Settings and Places

Students integrated digital media use into their learning environments as they navigated various everyday settings and places such as student

accommodations, the university campus, cafés, restaurants, shops, and parks. Media applications were accessed in these places on their phones or tablets using free Wi-Fi or mobile data.

TikTok's "saving" feature enabled them to store digital content to "a user profile" on their device by pressing the "like" and "add to favourites" icons on the screen (Figure 4.1). This feature facilitated their instant engagement with a variety of contents on the platform, enabling them to review and reinforce learning while 'on the move' across various everyday spaces. Noteworthy expressions such as "I am under the weather" and "It is a piece of cake" were particularly saved and reviewed.

Students' uses of "user profiles", within which all the selected contents were saved, demonstrate how they crafted personalised

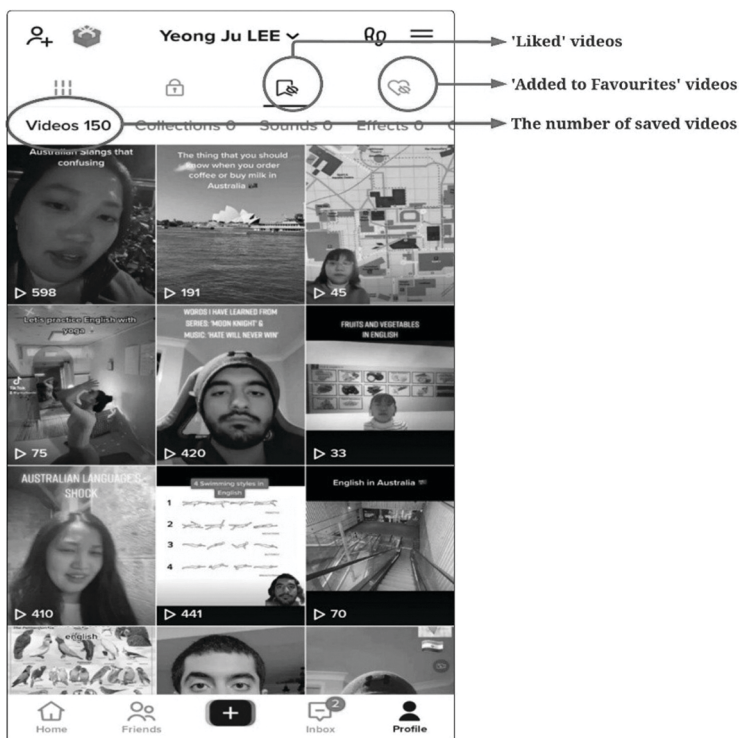


Figure 4.1 TikTok's Interface for the Content Saving Feature in a Profile.

learning spaces within the digital platform. Joy referred to her user profile as “a convenient space” that she regularly accessed via her phone “to review and keep learning until [she] actually remember[s]”. Shasha described it as “[her] own learning space”, crafted according to her interest in English learning. Jieun further highlighted the “convenience” and “immediacy” of this user profile space, commenting how it reduced the need to use note-taking tools on the phone. Prem commented on its benefits to the mobile language learning experience: “I can learn whenever I am free and wherever I go.” His comment suggests that mobility in learning has become more complex in space and that learning flexibility has increased over time.

Instagram’s “saved” feature also served as a tool for students to store and revisit language-related posts, especially on daily vocabulary, idioms, and grammar rules. Interestingly, Shasha used Instagram’s “collection” feature – that enables users to organise saved posts into different folders based on themes (Figure 4.2) – to organise content based on her interests such as “travel” and “Aussie slangs”. This approach allowed her to quickly retrieve and review relevant language materials depending on the context she encountered in her real life.

These findings demonstrate how students situated digital language learning across various physical settings by leveraging features such as TikTok’s “saving” and Instagram’s “collection”. The spatial affordances of these features enabled them to organise and access digital learning with increased mobility and convenience in everyday spaces. This integration also reflects the exercise of learner agency in creating personalised, flexible learning environments. Therefore, the findings highlight how the terrestrial context of settings, combined with the acted-upon technological affordances, can facilitate mobile language learning experiences.

4.1.2 Integration 2: Searching for Linguistic Information Encountered in In-place Interactions

Students frequently used the “search” feature on Instagram and TikTok to quickly find linguistic information on new words and expressions they encountered during real-life interactions. This helped them to overcome language barriers and to build confidence to use new vocabulary while engaging in in-place interactions. While they sometimes employed search tools such as Google, online dictionaries, and translation applications for basic vocabulary knowledge



Figure 4.2 Instagram's Interface Feature for Organising Content in a Profile.

including definitions and pronunciations, students navigated social media spaces to find “visual” examples of practical language use in real-life conversations.

The students especially perceived the language learning affordance of TikTok’s multimodal content to include demonstrations of situational language application. For instance, during a yoga class, Jieun’s instructor coughed after drinking water, prompting her to say, “something went down to the wrong pipe”, an expression Jieun was unfamiliar with at that time. During the break, Jieun utilised Naver (a Korean search tool) to translate the expression from Korean to English and used Google and YouTube to find its definition with examples in English. She then searched TikTok for videos of practical examples where creators simulate use of the expression in relevant situations, to assist her to envision herself in those contexts. In another example, Shasha was told to wait in the “queue” before entering a restaurant. With only a vague understanding of the meaning of “queue”, she searched on TikTok and learnt that it refers to a “line” in Australian English. After acquiring this new knowledge, Shasha often incorporated the word “queue” into her real-life communications for practice, telling her friends to “join the queue” when visiting restaurants.

Similarly, the students used Instagram’s search function to find explanations and real-world visual examples of new English phrases they encountered in daily conversations. For instance, while waiting in a café, Amir overheard a customer saying, “Can I grab a small flat white?” Being unfamiliar with the term “flat white”, he searched Instagram and found several posts detailing different types of coffee commonly ordered in Australia, combined with images illustrating the distinctions between a flat white, latte, and cappuccino. Seeing the explanations alongside visually structured examples enabled Amir to remember and confidently use the term when ordering coffee. These stories exemplify how the students engaged in learning by searching for linguistic information online to both review and preview interactive situations and language use in everyday life activities.

These findings highlight how the students acted upon the language learning affordance of the search feature on TikTok and Instagram to bridge digital and physical learning spaces. This was achieved by incorporating virtual engagement with multimodal and visual content, and in-person practices in in-place interactions. This demonstrates the exercise of learner agency in choosing digital resources that align

with particular learning needs around situational and practical language use. The learning environment's spatial configuration was thus highly adaptive to their uses of mobile media technology, allowing transitions between virtual and physical contexts.

4.1.3 Integration 3: Perceiving a Sense of Mobility and Spatial Presence through Digital Content

Students obtained knowledge on informal and practical language use from the content not explicitly designed for English learning or teaching, but which showcased English use in “real-life settings and spaces”. Moreover, they perceived a sense of mobility and spatial presence when engaging with such content that provided contextually relevant examples applicable to their everyday language use.

On TikTok, for instance, Prem watched cooking videos filmed in real-life settings and acquired new vocabulary related to nutrition and ingredients which he could apply when asking for items at grocery stores. He noted, “TikTok videos involve real interactions that stimulate my idea of where and which context I can use words.” Shasha also improved her speaking and communication skills through vlogs on Australian life-style, fashion, and live makeup videos recorded in everyday locations such as beaches, clothing stores, or beauty shops. This helped her to learn about Australian culture and trends, which proved beneficial for making local friends. In addition, Jieun enhanced her confidence to socialise with locals by learning humorous “punch lines that made people laugh” from comedy and prank videos filmed in common public places such as cafés, parks, and streets.

Furthermore, students reported “a sense of being in and moving around” the settings and spaces in TikTok videos where creators demonstrated real-life interactions. They perceived that they could visit those spaces “virtually” and vicariously participate in the interactions with creators, suggesting an emplacement of TikTok content in which language is *physically* used and *virtually* learnt. Shasha explained, “TikTok videos are filmed in real-life spaces. I can learn how people use words, expressions, or slangs in specific spaces. If they are walking on the street, I feel like I am walking there.” In addition, the students all mentioned the perceptual effect of TikTok's interface where a video is shown on the entire screen. As indicated by Amir, this feature provided them with a face-to-face experience that enabled them to “easily move around different places.”

Students also experienced a sense of virtual presence when using Instagram through its images, captions, and hashtags (including location tags). Amir followed Instagram accounts documenting daily life in English-speaking countries such as “life in London” and “daily Aussie slang”. He felt as if he were experiencing new spaces virtually by observing how people interacted in cafés, supermarkets, and on public transportation. He mentioned about a series of images depicting everyday scenarios, accompanied by descriptive captions and relevant vocabulary in hashtags. While the students acknowledged that TikTok offered more interactive, audiovisual exposure, they nonetheless found Instagram useful to learn structured, location-based visual learning.

The language learning affordances on TikTok and Instagram thus enabled the students to develop spatial awareness in relation to language use, reinforcing their ability to apply linguistic knowledge learnt online in relevant daily settings. Importantly, their initiative to specifically choose and explore contextually relevant digital content highlights the role of learner agency in utilising “non-linguistic”, digital resources for linguistic learning purposes. Spatially, how individual learning environments are constructed depends on the learners’ personal interests and learning needs as they influence both the choice of digital content and the emplacement of content.

4.1.4 Integration 4: Creating Digital Content to Reflect on Learning Experiences in Everyday Life Space

Students actively created and shared digital content on TikTok and Instagram, reflecting their linguistic knowledge and learning experiences that emerged in daily contexts. They often created TikTok videos by speaking directly to the camera or incorporating photos and videos taken from the spaces where the learning occurred. This helped them to practise speaking and pronunciation. For instance, Shasha shared weekly TikTok posts introducing the Australian slang and abbreviations she had learnt from Australian friends such as “brekkie” (breakfast), “Maccas” (MacDonald’s), and “barbie” (barbecue) (Figure 4.3). She presented her new learning in role-play formats simulating conversations in the spaces where they occurred.

Importantly, students’ uses of TikTok’s “Green Screen” effect – which enables creators to overlay topic-relevant images as

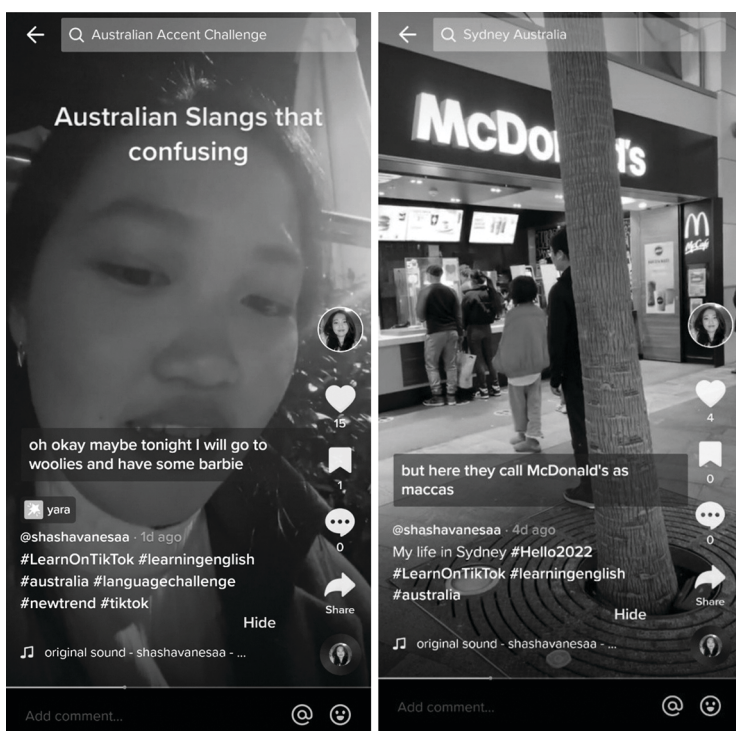


Figure 4.3 Shasha's TikTok Example.

video backgrounds while remaining on-screen (Lee, 2023) – exemplify how digital affordances support convenient and easy reflections on everyday learning experiences in space and time. They also applied editing tools to insert text or emojis, adjust auto-captions generating subtitles, and create video descriptions with keywords or hashtags (#). In Figure 4.4, for instance, Joy applied the Green Screen effect in her TikTok video to show a map as the background image while explaining her learning journey on campus. In her video, she introduced the English language knowledge she had gained from reading building names; for example, the meaning of “aquatic” is related to water from the “aquatic centre” and the “-er” and “-re” spelling difference between American and Australian English based on the spellings of “centre” and “theatre”. As such, this feature of

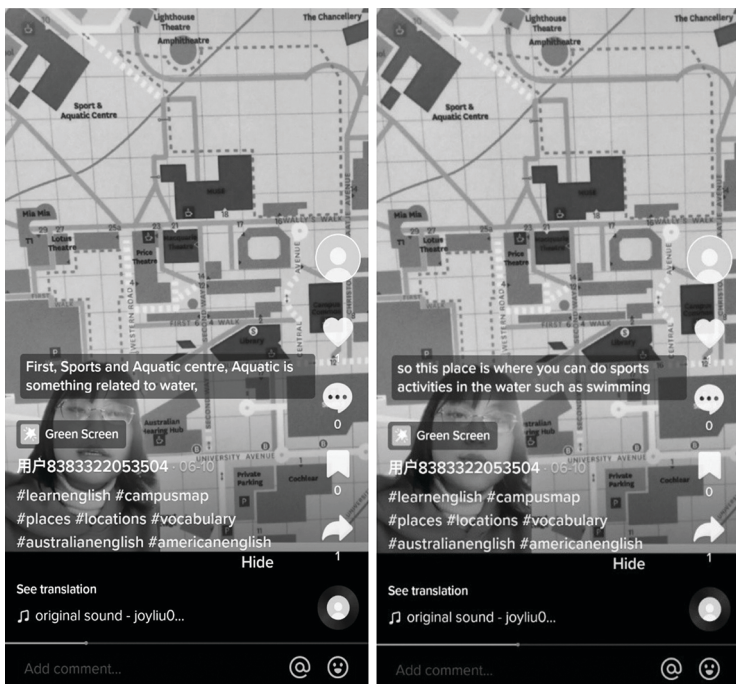


Figure 4.4 Joy's TikTok Example.

TikTok allowed the students to create video content that reflected their learning in artificially constructed spaces that mirror real-life environments. It thus enhanced their ability to contextualise and retain language knowledge. Joy also employed auto-captions to transcribe her speech and added video descriptions with relevant hashtags such as #learnenglish, #vocabulary, #campusmap, #places, and #locations. As reported by all students, these features proved helpful for correcting pronunciation and for articulating content in key words in English. Joy's post represents how these editing features were utilised to consolidate linguistic knowledge emerging in daily life, with a direct reflection on the settings and environments where learning occurred.

Students also used Instagram to share image posts (often created using external editing programmes) that integrated text annotations to



Figure 4.5 Shasha’s Instagram Example.

contextualise new vocabulary and reinforce language learning through real-life interactions. In Figure 4.5, for instance, Shasha shared an image post on Instagram which included text overlay to annotate and explain the word “dressing” as encountered in her everyday conversation. The post documented her experience of learning the word while dining at a restaurant. She included the question asked to her by the waitress – “What kind of dressing would you like for your salad?” – as text in the image. In the caption, she shared the conversation that followed:

Shasha: “What is that? Dressing? Are you asking me about clothes or something?”

Waitress: “No, I mean a dressing, like a sauce that you pour into your salad.”

Through this conversation, Shasha learnt the distinction between “dressing” (as in salad dressing) and “dress” (as in clothing).

Figure 4.6 shows Jieun’s use of Instagram to share an image post featuring a sign she encountered while visiting the State Library of NSW. The sign displaying safety rules included the statement, “All visitors must adhere to...” Although she had heard the expression “adhere to” before, she had never seen it used in a real-life context. Intrigued by its usage, Jieun took a photo of the sign and later conducted research at

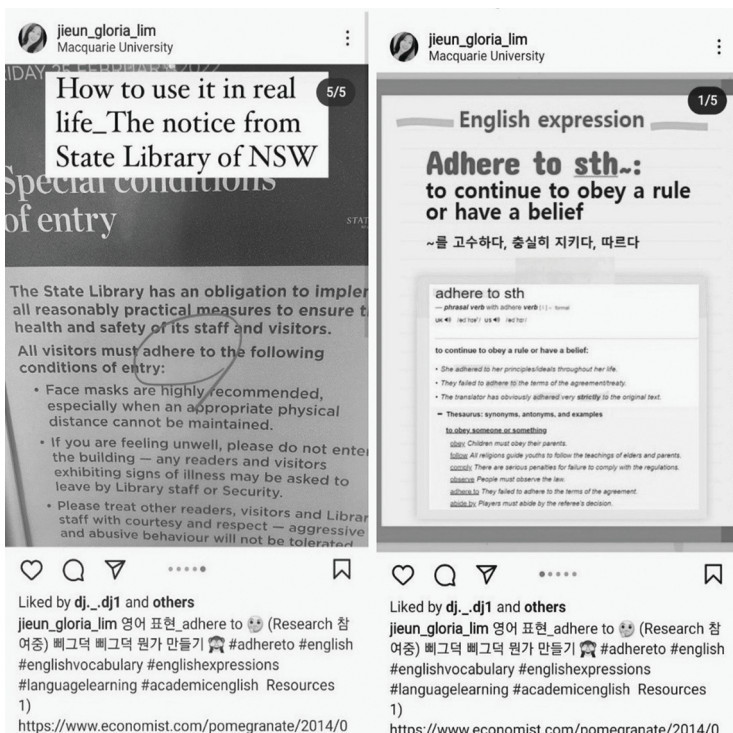


Figure 4.6 Jieun’s Instagram Example.

home using various online tools, including Google, dictionaries, and news sources, to explore its meaning and practical examples. She then created an Instagram post combining the original photo with an image she designed using an external editing programme. In this image, she included the definition, “To continue to obey a rule or have a belief,” along with the Korean translation “~를 고수하다, 충실히 지키다, 따르다.” Additionally, she provided example sentences, including, “She adhered to her principles throughout her life.” By creating this Instagram post, Jieun was thus able to contextualise vocabulary knowledge and reinforce her understanding of an unfamiliar expression using both visual and linguistic elements.

These findings highlight how TikTok and Instagram functioned as platforms for participatory learning, allowing the students to harness the language learning affordances of the platform’s editing features to actively produce content and reflect on their linguistic development. The Green Screen effect on TikTok particularly enabled them to project their real-life environments and physical surroundings directly into their videos, visually demonstrating their physical mobility in learning. In contrast, Instagram’s image-based format facilitated a more structured, reflective approach to learning as students used photos combined with externally-edited text annotations to document and analyse new vocabulary encountered in real-life settings. Through the lens of the spatial framework, the findings indicate that the students exercised strong volitional agency and creativity to transition their learning from physical settings to digital media-sharing spaces. Their initiative to use external programmes for Instagram posts especially highlights this, as they structured their learning experiences beyond the platform’s features. By integrating their physical and digital activities, the content creation practices thus underscore the interconnected nature of digital language learning within diverse life settings and environments as navigated by individuals.

4.1.5 Integration 5: Conceptual Change of the Relationship between Digital Learning and Everyday Life Spaces

During this present research, the students’ conceptions of the relationship between digital and everyday-life learning transformed from a sense of separation to one of integration. Initially, they preferred to engage in online interactions due to the convenience of having “enough time to digest” language knowledge, whereas in-place

interactions with locals posed challenges due to a lack of confidence in their language skills and the unfamiliar English-speaking spatial circumstances. Over time, however, they realised the importance of integrating digital language learning within their everyday life spaces using social media technologies. Exposure to practical, conversational, and cultural English in use through digital content enhanced their confidence to engage in conversations with locals. On this integration, Shasha commented, “Online and offline learning make synergy when they are combined.”

Through their participation in this research, the students learnt to conceptualise the relationship between digital and everyday-life learning through a spatial lens. For instance, when comparing his learning experiences in digital and physical spaces, Prem used the juxtaposition of “moving between two worlds,” which I have borrowed for the title of Section 4.1. He explained, “Online spaces are where I explore new content to obtain useful knowledge through interacting with people online, whereas offline spaces are where I use that knowledge with people outside. It’s like moving between two worlds.” Prem’s use of words such as “space”, “where”, and “worlds” in his response indicate his awareness of the learning environment’s spatial configuration. His use of ‘outside’ further highlights his spatially-oriented conception of moving *in* and *out* of the two worlds. This notion was echoed by Amir, who stated, “I prepare myself to meet people outside.” Moreover, Jieun, who initially had strong doubts about using social media for educational purposes, started to view them as “spaces where [she] can learn something new and unexpected” that she would eventually use in “[her] real-life spaces.” Shasha gained confidence as an English speaker by watching entertaining videos on TikTok, describing the platform as “[her] own learning space where [she] met like-minded people.” In addition, Joy articulated a sense of connectedness between the digital and physical worlds, particularly when using mobile devices and applications, describing it as “opening a door to a new world.” These comments suggest the spatially-oriented shift that occurs when adapting digital language learning to daily spatial circumstances.

These findings reveal a change in the students’ conceptions of the integration of digital and everyday-life learning. This change emerged as a result of their navigation between digital and physical worlds, transitioning from spaces where they acquired new knowledge to spaces where they applied their new knowledge. From a spatial

perspective, contemporary language learning environments comprise various learning spaces and digital resources layered within dynamic movements of learning between the two worlds.

4.2 A Language Learning Environment Encompassing Digital and Physical Spaces

The findings from the multiple case study have presented how five participants integrated TikTok and Instagram's innovative language learning affordances with everyday life activities to facilitate dynamic language learning through movements between digital and physical worlds. The findings have also identified a shift in their conception of the relationship between digital and everyday life learning – from a sense of separation to one of integration – which emerged as a consequence of their learning experiences while navigating the two worlds. The following three sections elaborate on these findings through a spatial lens, highlighting the dynamic *traversal* of learning experiences and capturing the reciprocal *movement* between digital and physical spaces. Building on Benson's (2021) spatial perspective on technology use for language learning in the construction of learning environments, the spatial framework provides a mechanism to explore spaces where language learning occurs “virtually” through engagement with digital media and physical mobility.

4.2.1 Integrations 1 and 2: Spatially Situated Experiences of Digital Language Learning

The present study reveals that students' learning environments are shaped through navigations of diverse physical settings and access to digital content and features with mobile devices. Regarding *Integrations 1* and *2*, this study's findings reflect Benson's (2023) emphasis on learner's physical mobility from carrying digital resources in terrestrial settings and Godwin-Jones' (2019) focus on spatial configurations in digital language learning. Different from previous studies that recorded or mapped out students' geographical routines (e.g., Al-Ali, 2014; Benson et al., 2018), this present study shows the language learning affordances of TikTok's and Instagram's features acted upon by individual students to facilitate *both* physical mobilities and virtual engagement. The acted-upon affordances of the “save” and “search” features provide evidence of learner agency

in organising language resources for immediate access in space and time, and for both virtual and physical learning interactions. Students' personalised learning spaces created through uses of TikTok's "user profile" and Instagram's "collection" features facilitated continuous learning and practice *within* and *outside* the platform. These findings reflect Moores' (2012) view of digital media as spaces intersecting with geographical and physical spaces as part of social life. This interconnectedness of media and life spaces thus strengthens Dong and Blommaert's (2016) assertion of the intersection between online and offline language learning scales.

Students' choices to use social media to locate multimodal content among various search applications demonstrate their agency in aligning personal learning needs with acquiring situational and practical language use. TikTok's video-based search results provided immediate and audiovisual demonstrations of language use in relevant situational contexts. Moreover, Instagram's search feature enabled learners to explore more structured, image-based content with text annotation and conceptualisation. These findings demonstrate that individual learning environments are adaptive to mobile technology use in response to personal dynamics emerging in everyday life situations, supporting Han and Reinhardt's (2022) observation of alignment between people's personal lives and their exploration of the digital wilds. The finding also contributes to previous studies on mobile locative media that have revealed how place-based, real-world activities enhance language use through contextually embedded learning environments (Sydorenko et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2021). Therefore, this study shows how language learners utilise technological features to create learning affordances by integrating digital and physical activities. It enriches the understanding of spatially situated digital language learning while offering insight into the interconnectedness between social media and everyday life spaces.

4.2.2 Integrations 3 and 4: Spatial Connectedness Mediated through Multimodal Learning and Screens

The present study provides insight into the spatial connectedness among individuals, mediated through multimodal learning, and projected onto the screen, thus connecting digital and physical worlds. Regarding *Integration 3*, students' perceived sense of "being in" and "moving around" real-life spaces emerged through interactive engagements with multimodal content on TikTok and

Instagram. On TikTok, the students experienced a strong sense of spatial immersion through dynamic interactions with content filmed in physical locations, reinforcing Benson's (2023) notion of screen-mediated learning. On the other hand, Instagram facilitated in students a sense of place and presence in geographically dispersed environments through image posts and textual annotations that contextualised vocabulary encountered in real-life interactions. These findings enhance Jacquemet's (2013) and Castells' (2016) conceptualisations of a sense of space over global distances. Previous empirical studies have focused mostly on transnational social connections between two countries (Lam, 2014; Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). However, the present study reveals movement across physical settings and traversal to media spaces, expanding understanding of the diaspora engagements of both local and global geographies. As such, it signifies emplacement within everyday spaces through multimodal content and virtual interactions, advancing prior conceptualisations of embodied experience of place (Moore, 2012).

Regarding *Integration 4*, student initiatives to create multimodal content reflecting situated learning experiences highlight agency and creativity as well as spatiality and mobility projected onto the screen. They effectively harnessed TikTok's in-application content-editing features (e.g., using the Green Screen effect) to project language learning settings and mobility within digital content and to transpose real-world experiences into artificially designed digital spaces. Moreover, students' initiatives to use external programs to create Instagram posts highlight their agency and motivation to structure learning experiences beyond in-application features. Textual annotations overlaid onto real-world photographs or dialogues reinforced their learning of language use in context. These findings extend previous research on mobile locative technology (Sydorenko et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2021) by highlighting how technological innovation enables the production of local learning environments and the production of space on a global scale where language circulates and is learned through multimodal digital interactions.

4.2.3 Integration 5: Conceptual Integration of Language Learning Between Digital and Everyday Life Spaces

This study affirms the spatial framework's suitability for examining the interaction of online and offline activities, adding analytical power to conceptualisations of the relationship between digital

and everyday-life learning. Concerning *Integration 5*, the findings suggest a conceptual shift in this relationship from a sense of separation to one of integration, which emerged from students' navigation between online and offline learning interactions. The integration of online and offline learning practices aligns with Hellermann and Thorne's (2020) discussion on "distributed" language learning in naturalistic settings. Furthermore, the students' perceptions of moving between virtual social media and physical spaces support Benson's (2023) claims about the perceptual effects of accessing information online.

The analysis of student narratives in this study, illustrating their spatial perspectives on digital language learning and their awareness of the learning environment's spatial configuration, contributes to the growing body of studies on informal, out-of-class language learning (Benson et al., 2018; Chik, 2017; Kuure, 2011; Han & Reinhardt, 2022; Lai, 2015, 2017; Sockett, 2013). While previous studies have emphasised access to technology in physical spaces or with physical mobilities, the present study shows how social media use enriches language learning environments and supports the navigation of both digital and physical spaces. This study thus extends its focus to connect the geospatial environment with digital spaces within the broader context of the learner's life. It further demonstrates how individual language learning environments are shaped by a complex interplay of digital and physical spaces according to technologies employed by learners and the learning affordances they create. Therefore, the spatial framework further elucidates the interconnected nature of digital language use within diverse life settings and their emergent integration as learning traverses seamlessly between digital and physical worlds.

4.3 Pedagogical Implications

Several pedagogical implications for language learning emerge from the findings reported and discussed in this study. In particular, implications related to how students' everyday informal digital learning can be incorporated into the classroom using multimodal media-sharing social networking platforms. Drawing on the five forms of integration previously outlined in Section 4.1, the following pedagogical strategies offer practical ways for teachers to support language learning by students that reflect their mobile, spatial, and digitally mediated experiences.

4.3.1 Pedagogical Strategy 1: Developing Contextualised Digital Language Learning Portfolios

Students' use of TikTok's and Instagram's "save" feature for learning suggest a pedagogical opportunity for students to create personalised digital language learning portfolios. Language teachers might assign students a weekly task to save linguistically useful or personally relevant social media posts (e.g., casual greetings, politeness strategies, or region-specific phrases or slang). Teachers might also guide students to select posts that reflect words or expressions they have recently encountered or anticipate using in real-life interactions. Teachers may then ask students to write journal entries with links or screenshots of the posts, summaries of their linguistic focus, and brief reflections on practical use. Teachers may also ask students to categorise their collected items under specific themes related to everyday spatial and conversational contexts (e.g., public transport, schools, customer services, or social greetings). Students can compile these items into a personal portfolio and upload it to a shared class site created by tools like Google Sites or SharePoint for peer review. They can then build a themed, searchable archive of digital language learning encounters, anchored in real-world communicative contexts.

To support reflective learning, language teachers may also introduce regular "context exploration" sessions where students select a saved item and explain its application in their lives. This would help students to consider contextually specific language use. Colour-coded templates or checklists might be useful, helping students to visualise their learning across various settings and places. To scaffold deeper reflection, teachers might offer prompts that ask students to consider each phrase's functional purpose (e.g., giving advice or expressing politeness), register (e.g., formal vs. informal), and relevance to their routines (e.g., at work, on public transport, or in a group setting).

Ultimately, these tasks would turn passive content saving into reflective, goal-oriented language learning practices. They would promote digital literacy by encouraging critical content curation, reinforce vocabulary retention through contextual analysis, and strengthen awareness of spatially and socially embedded language use. As a result, they would support students to perceive digital engagement as valuable towards shaping their broader language learning environment.

4.3.2 Pedagogical Strategy 2: Scaffolding Out-of-Class Language Learning through Digital Spatial Storytelling

Students utilised TikTok and Instagram’s “search” features to investigate unfamiliar phrases or expressions encountered in their daily interactions. To consolidate this practice, language teachers may consider scaffolding students’ out-of-class language learning through a “spatial storytelling” activity. Students might create TikTok-style videos or Instagram-style images illustrating specific contexts – *where*, *when*, *how*, and *with whom* an expression was encountered, alongside the digital resources used for exploration. Teachers might then guide students to visually anchor their real-world contexts by incorporating place-specific references. For example, they may capture the actual location (e.g., workplace tours) using their mobile device or using in-application social media features such as TikTok’s Green Screen feature to superimpose background images. (Note: users can create content using these features and download it directly to their devices without having to upload it to the platform.) Teachers may then structure classroom presentations where students explain the expressions and introduce the digital tools they used to build understanding.

To further enrich this strategy, teachers might integrate a “peer storytelling exchange” exercise where students pair up to exchange multimodal artefacts and discuss their experiences in detail. Each pair then creates a dialogue or short role-play script that integrates uses of the expressions from both artefacts. Students would rehearse their dialogue or script, focusing on pronunciation, fluency, and contextual appropriateness, and then perform them in class while receiving feedback from peers and the teacher. This peer-driven task would deepen linguistic insights by promoting negotiation of meaning through mutual explanation, pronunciation practice, and vocabulary retention.

Teachers might also create a shared digital archive using Padlet, Google Drive, or a private class social media account to which students contribute regularly. The archive would serve as a repository of digital learning artefacts and as a space for collaborative learning. Importantly, teachers can use the archive to monitor students’ learning, identify areas of linguistic difficulty, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. It would also provide teachers with valuable insights on how to develop curriculum activities closely aligned with students’ authentic language use and real-world contexts. Therefore, spatial

storytelling would help cultivate a dynamic and integrated approach to language teaching that extends beyond the classroom.

4.3.3 Pedagogical Strategy 3: Mapping Language-in-Space Encounters Through Visual Simulation

Students developed a sense of presence while engaging with social media content filmed in specific physical spaces and settings. To integrate this affordance into the classroom, language teachers might design a project where students create interactive “language-in-space maps” that simulate mobility and linguistic encounters across physical spaces. Students might use GPS-enabled diary applications such as Diaro (employed by Benson et al., 2018, as reviewed in Chapter 2) to record linguistic encounters and their language learning environments. They might then create a map to visually represent their learning journeys by using tools like Google My Maps to place pins at relevant locations (e.g., local cafés, campus facilities, or public transportation hubs). Teachers might encourage students to include multimedia attachments (e.g., video clips or social media images) on each pinned location. Students might then be encouraged to write captions detailing the specific language encountered and the contextual cues describing their understanding (e.g., tone, setting, and speaker intent).

To expand spatial imagination, teachers may also organise classroom activities where students simulate “language learning walks” for their peers. Students might be encouraged to narrate a pathway through their map, sequentially presenting various language encounters along a route (e.g., “From the grocery store to the pharmacy, I heard and learnt these phrases ...”). These interactive maps might be projected onto a classroom screen and navigated interactively, allowing students to visually and conceptually “walk through” each other’s language learning journeys.

This creative strategy would merge linguistic reflection with spatial movement, thus facilitating students to visualise language-in-place in dynamic, learner-driven ways. This approach would foster a collaborative classroom atmosphere, encourage active listening and detailed linguistic observation, and help students to connect abstract language concepts with tangible everyday spaces. It would thus enhance spatial cognition, creativity, and retention as students anchor linguistic learning in visually stimulating, context-rich environments.

4.3.4 Pedagogical Strategy 4: Collaborative Language Learning Podcasts

To build on students' active engagement in creating digital content based on authentic daily language encounters, teachers may introduce a "collaborative podcast project" where students work in small groups to identify practical language-focused themes (e.g., ordering food, customer service interactions, making medical appointments). Students might then develop podcast episodes around specific scenarios within those themes (e.g., ordering allergy-friendly meals, requesting a refund, or applying for health insurance reimbursement) using digital audio editors like Audacity or Anchor.

Teachers encourage students to record real-world audio examples or recreate dialogues for their podcasts. Students might also interview language teachers, international students, or peers with study abroad experience to learn about useful expressions and common challenges faced by language learners. Students might then script realistic, scenario-based dialogues to explicitly demonstrate accurate language usage, and typical conversational patterns. Each podcast could even provide actionable language tips (e.g., strategies for polite interactions in everyday situations). Completed podcasts might be shared via a suitable platform (e.g., Google Classroom or Padlet), or uploaded to a private podcast channel hosted on platforms like SoundCloud or Anchor for peer discussion. Teachers might also incorporate the podcasts into classroom exercises where students practise phrases and dialogues together and participate in role-play activities. This structured and creative approach would promote both oral skills and practical language application.

4.3.5 Pedagogical Strategy 5: Supporting Meta-Awareness of Language Learning Across Digital and Physical Spaces

Students were found to conceptually integrate digital and everyday-life learning, particularly in relation to the movement between digital and physical spaces. This conceptual integration calls for a pedagogical strategy that assist students to recognise and articulate how language learning unfolds both online and offline. Teachers could encourage students to examine this link by documenting events or instances of online and offline language learning (e.g., watching Netflix series, conversing with neighbours, using transport applications while commuting, or engaging with an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot). These entries might be compiled into narrative-based artefacts such

as digital journals, voice memos, or visual timelines to chart the *flow* of their language-learning experience across diverse platforms and locations.

Students might also be given prompts to help them narrate their experiences; for instance, “Did something you saw online help you to talk to someone in real life?” or “Have you had a chat with someone and then looked something up online? Why?”. Finally, students might present their learning pathways to the class, identifying patterns in their language engagement while also learning useful strategies from classmates. This activity would enable students to recognise the dynamic interplay between various digital media, physical places, and language practices. It would thus help them to develop meta-awareness of language learning across digital and physical spaces. It would also empower them to make strategic choices about how they engage with language in different settings in a more interconnected manner.

Considered together, these five pedagogical strategies facilitate language learning as integrated across digital platforms and everyday physical environments. They encourage learners to embrace their lived experiences and social media practices while viewing language development as part of a broader, ongoing engagement with the digital and physical worlds around them.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has explored how five English-language learners studying abroad in Australia used mobile devices and applications in their everyday life spaces, addressing RQ2. Based on narrative data, it has identified five key integrations to demonstrate how learners agentively and creatively organised digital resources to integrate digital language learning into their life. Drawing on the spatial framework, this chapter demonstrated how language learning can now traverse digital and physical worlds. In doing so, it re-frames mobile language learning as the dynamic integration of both realms, and not simply as physical movement. In response to RQ3, this chapter concluded with details of pedagogical strategies to support language teachers to integrate the findings of this study into their classroom practices. Collectively, these strategies illustrate how teachers can support students’ informal digital engagement through reflective, spatially-aware teaching that bridges everyday digital practices with formal instruction.

5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the contributions of this book based on the key findings to emerge from the two studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4. The contributions are discussed in relation to the spatial theoretical framework applied in the studies and the emergent pedagogical insights into the role of social media in language learning. Suggestions for future research are then provided before concluding with some final reflections.

5.1 Contributions

This book investigated the creative uses of social media for informal language learning. Particular focus was given to the utilisation of technological innovations recently available on TikTok and Instagram. The investigation primarily aimed to advance understanding of the current phenomenon of visual and multimodal social networking for language learning that has hitherto received limited attention in CALL research. Findings from the two studies reported in this book add to the body of research on language learning outside the classroom by demonstrating how such language learning occurs in digital spaces, and how such learning dynamics are changing in response to technological innovations. Importantly, findings from the two studies further demonstrate how learners organise digital learning and incorporate it into everyday life spaces. As such, they advance our knowledge of self-directed, informal CALL from the broader “learning” and “life” perspectives. Moreover, the spatial perspective employed in this book highlights the language learners’ experiences of global and digital spaces, beyond physical spaces. The following sections discuss in

detail how theoretical concepts and ideas in the spatial perspective framework contribute to our knowledge of how social media and technology are utilised for informal language learning.

5.1.1 Cross-Study Conclusions and Contributions: Theoretical and Practical Insights in the Spatial Framework

Findings reported in the two studies discussed in this book confirm the appropriateness of the spatial perspective of digital technology and learning as a framework for investigating creative uses of social media technologies in their everyday lives for informal language learning. The discussions provided in Chapters 3 and 4 confirm that the spatial perspective offers a holistic framework that encompasses key theoretical concepts and ideas including learning affordance, learner agency, creativity, multimodality/digital literacy, complex dynamics, space, and environment. Regarding learning affordance, learner agency, creativity, multimodality, and complex dynamic systems, the spatial framework can be used to explain how language learners organise digital learning and how it fits into everyday uses of space. It concerns technological features available in social media spaces and how learners exercise agency and creativity to apply these features to create affordances and spaces for learning interactions with online users. It also considers how uses of these affordances are related to digital literacies and multimodality. It further confirms the framework's suitability to analyse complex, dynamic, and emergent learning experiences across digital spaces and everyday life spaces. Moreover, it aligns with notions of transnational networks and globalisation in that it explores the interactive activities captured among culturally, linguistically, and geographically diverse users.

Regarding the spatial framework's practical application, it especially adds analytical power to the "online and offline activities interaction" or "online-offline nexus" (Blommaert, 2021, p. 1) that current digital technologies can afford in language learning. It advances our understanding of digital language learning and literacy by offering an appropriate analytical framework to investigate how digital learning activities and other everyday activities integrate. It particularly offers the insight that digital learning can be *re*-contextualised both within transnational and global digital spaces where language is used among distant individuals, and within diverse physical real-life spaces where technologies are accessed for mobile learning opportunities.

In addition, it invites further discussions on both interaction (user to content creator and/or to other users) and interactivity (human user to device). Therefore, this book uncovers a new approach to informal digital language learning through the development of the spatial framework. Specifically, it addresses the adaptation of digital interactive activities for language learning and the integration of mobile language learning into everyday interactive activities.

5.1.2 Cross-Study Conclusions and Contributions: Pedagogical Insights into the Role of Social Media for Language Learning

Findings reported in the two studies discussed in this book invite reconsideration of language teaching pedagogy in terms of both teaching strategies and how language learning is understood and supported within learners' broader life experiences. We often view social media as merely a supplementary tool for language learning, but it is indeed an integral part of learners' lived environments where learning and meaning-making occur every day. Findings from the multiple-case study reported in Chapter 4 show how users of TikTok and Instagram engage with English in ways that are contextual, embodied, and driven by personal interests and social interactions. These informal engagements are deeply embedded in the flow of everyday activities, suggesting language learning is constantly shaped through mobile, digital, and social practices.

From a pedagogical perspective, recognising social media as a space for language learning expands the role of language teachers. It encourages teachers to adopt a more facilitative, reflective, and exploratory approach that values students' digital literacy practices, and that encourages students to draw connections between out-of-class experiences and classroom learning. Teachers may now consider how everyday digital practices form part of the students' language environment, shaping creativity, motivation, identity, and communicative awareness. Moreover, this broader view of language teaching pedagogy suggests the need to support learners to develop critical awareness of how language is used across different spaces, platforms, and modes. As students navigate diverse communications online, ranging from casual social interactions to algorithmically-curated content, they also encounter shifting norms of language use, formality, and participation. Pedagogical approaches that recognise this complexity can better prepare students to reflect on their experiences,

manage their learning trajectories, and develop a stronger sense of agency in global and multimodal spaces.

In short, this book highlights the pedagogical importance of incorporating social media use into the larger learning environments of students' lives. Social media is not just a digital tool, but is also a spatial, social, and semiotic environment in which learners actively construct meaning. By bridging everyday digital engagement and formal classroom instruction, pedagogy can reflect and support the realities of contemporary language learning more effectively. This perspective calls for more responsive and context-aware forms of language teaching that recognise the full spectrum of students' lived experiences.

5.2 Learning from Present Studies: Towards More Multimodal and Spatial Language Learning Dynamics

As language learners engage with increasingly mobile, multimodal, and spatially-embedded digital technologies, new forms of language learning emerge that require innovative research approaches and pedagogical responses. This section offers suggestions for future research to further explore the emergence of more multimodal and spatial learning dynamics driven by technological innovations and the implications for language learning.

One key direction for future research is to examine how the evolving nature of social media is *re*-shaping informal digital language learning practices. As social media platforms continue to evolve, they offer new ways for users to engage with languages in everyday digital contexts. As the findings from the two studies discussed in this book show, the use of hashtags — once primarily a tool for navigating, discovering, and categorising content — has evolved into a form of digital literacy that enables users to signal multimodal meanings and participate in collaborative content creation (see also, Lee, 2025b). Platforms like Instagram have introduced features such as “Stories” and “Reels” which encourage quick and dynamic audiovisual interactions with language while building on earlier modes of content such as written captions and image posts.

In addition, advancements in AI technologies — now integrated into these platforms through features such as automatic captioning, real-time translation, and personalised content delivery — are reshaping how users access, process, and produce language learning. These

developments make language learning experiences on social media more accessible, incidental, and embedded in learners' daily digital routines. Future research should explore how language learners make sense of, and adapt to, this changing landscape by redefining what it means to learn and to use language across platforms, interfaces, and in everyday life. Studies should also investigate how evolving platform features and algorithms influence language exposure and learning behaviours, and how learners interact with emerging multimodal and AI-enhanced affordances. A cross-case analysis of a larger and more diverse group of users would offer deeper insights into individual learning trajectories and preferences. Longitudinal approaches would complement this research by examining how learners' engagement with technology shifts over time in response to changes in platform design, algorithmic exposure, and digital literacy demands.

A second key direction is to explore the environment's impact on international students' everyday lives, the complexity of their learning environments, and their strategies for reconfiguring language learning practices using digital technologies. Future studies should pursue in-depth investigations of language learners' experiences and technology uses, considering both individual differences and city-specific environmental conditions. This could be achieved through a comparative analysis of international student cohorts in different multilingual cities. I am particularly interested in how digital technologies visually and multimodally spatialise language use and learning experiences. Walking methods – interviewing students while walking around the spaces and environments where learning is experienced (O'Neill & Roberts, 2020) – could be adopted to depict how students engage with language(s) in particular settings where they access various technologies. This book reported findings regarding students' creation of multimodal digital content of their situated learning experiences in everyday life spaces. Further research should, therefore, also encourage students to record vlogs or snapshots of their learning environments as a method to extract rich visual data on technologically mediated everyday life learning and spatially situated digital learning.

Lastly, future research should be designed to include a large-scale collaborative educational project with language teachers. Chapters 3 and 4 discussed the pedagogical implications for language teachers of the findings to emerge from the two studies of focus. Nonetheless,

access to new technologies may not – on its own – enhance the quality of language teaching. Future research should explore how to better integrate classroom learning and everyday life learning by, for example, investigating how stakeholders (including teachers, curriculum developers, and students) might co-design curriculum modules to incorporate students' everyday digital practices into formal learning objectives. These modules could include reflective activities, multi-modal content creation, or critical discussions about language use on social media. In addition, future research is needed to explore language teachers' perceptions and awareness of students' language learning environments, along with their attitudes towards incorporating technologies, often utilised by students in everyday life, into the classroom.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter discussed the key findings of the two research studies presented in this book and the significance of these findings for language learning and teaching. The spatial perspective of digital technology and learning was shown to be an effective framework for addressing the stated research questions on language learners' creative uses of social media and technology within everyday life spaces. Incorporation of both online and narrative data also demonstrated the framework's capacity to obtain rich, broad-based understandings of informal learning. This book also recommended that future research designs and topics consider both digital and physical language learning in depth, as well as both learning and teaching.

The entire research process outlined and discussed in this book prompted extensive critical reflection by me as a researcher and as a teacher-learner. This process included exploring newer social media platforms and utilising newer technologies, analysing new ways of learning/teaching languages online, sharing stories with the students, and learning innovative ways of devising language learning opportunities online. I hope that this book will support future research and language teaching pedagogy to further broaden our understanding of social media's role in language learning in both physical and digital spaces. This is especially important for teachers and students who wish to leverage newer technologies and multimodal learning materials to enhance their language learning experience.

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Index

- affordances, 19, 23, 28, 34, 40, 42, 58, 65–66
agency, 15, 19, 34, 42, 75
artificial intelligence, 77–78
augmented reality, 12
autonomy, 15
- Benson, P., 23, 24, 25, 26, 44, 51, 65, 67
bridging activities, 14
- complex systems theory, 15, 42
Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), 11–12, 14, 15, 27, 41, 74
computer-mediated communication (CMC), 18
- digital affordances. *See* affordances
digital information, 12
digital literacy, 17, 77
digital wilds, 13, 19
Duolingo, 12
- ecological perspectives, 18–19, 23, 42
Extramural Engagement (EE), 13
- Facebook, 18, 19
Flickr, 17, 18
foreign language learning. *See* informal language learning
globalisation, 18
Google, 54, 56, 63
- GPS-enabled mobile media, 12
grammar, 35, 38, 42, 46–47
Green Screen, 58–59, 60, 63, 70
- hashtags, 17, 21, 29, 31, 38, 40, 43, 44, 48–49, 60
- idioms, 35, 38–39, 40–41, 45, 46–47
Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), 13, 41
informal language learning, 1, 51;
ecological perspective, 18–19, 23, 42; on Instagram, 20, 37–38, 39–40, 54, 56, 58, 60–61, 62, 63, 65; learners' competence, 19; mobile devices, 12; pedagogical strategies, 45–46, 47–48, 49, 69–70, 71–72, 73, 76–77; real-life settings, 57, 58–59, 60, 63–64, 66, 72; recreation, 13–14, 15; research on, 11–12, 13–14, 15, 16–17, 18–19, 74; and social media, 2, 14, 19; spatiality, 23, 24–25, 26, 43–44, 57, 58, 66–67, 71; student experiences, 52–53, 54, 56–57, 58–59, 60, 61–62, 63–64, 68; on TikTok, 21, 30–31, 32–33, 34–35, 53–54, 56, 57, 58–59, 63, 65; user perspectives, 14 *see also* Instagram, language learning environments, TikTok
informal learning, 1
Instagram, 2, 5, 14; comparison with TikTok, 29, 58; creating content,

- 67; engagement on, 37; features, 29, 35, 38, 54; language learning on, 20, 37–38, 39–40, 54, 56, 58, 60–61, 62, 63, 65; research studies on, 20–21, 43; saving, 54, 66, 69; searching on, 56, 66, 70; sharing content, 60–61, 62–63
- language learning environments, 23, 25, 26–27, 44, 51–52, 64–65, 68
- locative media. *See* GPS-enabled media
- lockdowns, 1–2
- methodology, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9
- Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), 12, 41
- mobile devices, 12
- multimodality, 16–17, 18, 20–21, 24, 31, 33, 34, 46, 56, 67, 75, 78
- Naver, 56
- Netflix, 13
- New Literacies, 17
- NVivo, 6, 8
- Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), 13, 15, 41
- participatory learning, 63
- pedagogical strategies, 45–46, 47–48, 49, 69–70, 71–72, 73, 76–77
- peer-to-peer exchanges, 34, 48
- podcasts, 72
- pronunciation, 30, 31, 33, 45–46, 58
- RenRen, 19
- research gaps, 22–23
- saving content, 53, 54, 66, 69
- scale, 24–25
- search features, 54, 56, 66, 70
- sense of mobility, 57–58, 66–67
- Snapchat, 14
- social media, 1–2, 25–26 *see also specific social media sites*
- socio-semiotic theory, 16, 43
- space of flows, 25, 44
- spatial perspectives, 23, 24–25, 26, 43–44, 57, 58, 66–67, 71
- student experiences, 52–53, 54, 56–57, 58–59, 60, 61–62, 63–64, 68
- TikTok, 2, 5; comparison with Instagram, 29, 58; creating content, 58–59, 70; features, 29, 30, 31–32, 53, 67; Green Screen, 58–59, 63, 70; language learning on, 21, 30–31, 32–33, 34–35, 53–54, 56, 57, 58–59, 63, 65; multimodality, 31, 33, 34; research studies on, 21–22, 43; saving, 53, 69; searching on, 54, 56, 66, 70; user profiles, 53–54, 66
- translanguaging, 18
- transnational networks, 17–18, 43–44, 75
- transnational spaces, 18, 44
- video games, 15, 16, 19
- viewer participation, 32, 33, 37–38, 40
- WeChat, 18, 19
- Wikipedia, 16, 17
- World of Warcraft*, 19
- YouTube, 16, 17, 18, 56