

CHAPTER

9

TIKTOK AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

For many undergraduate students, learning linguistics can be an overwhelming experience. The subject is often perceived as dense, abstract, and detached from everyday language use. Traditional methods of instruction typically grounded in lectures and textbook readings have long shaped the teaching of linguistics in higher education. These “chalk and talk” approaches, while familiar, tend to focus on the transmission of knowledge and preparation for assessments rather than encouraging active engagement with language as a social and communicative phenomenon. As Winstone and Carless (2019) note, such approaches often prioritise grades over genuine understanding, leaving students with limited opportunities to explore the deeper, nuanced layers of language in use.

This reality became particularly salient when one of the authors was assigned to teach discourse analysis (DA), a final-year module in a teaching English as a second language (TESL) programme. DA, as a field, requires learners to go beyond surface structures of language to examine how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and sometimes concealed within social contexts. From the outset, it was clear that a more interactive and reflective teaching approach was needed one that could allow students to engage with

real-world examples of discourse, question assumptions, and collaboratively construct knowledge.

However, the onset of the Corona Virus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic disrupted these intentions. As universities moved swiftly to online teaching, classes were shifted to synchronous delivery via Webex. Although this ensured continuity, the teaching experience soon revealed significant limitations. Class discussions were sparse, cameras were frequently turned off, and students' engagement waned. The sessions grew increasingly exhausting, not only for the students but also for the instructor. It became evident that the conventional online classroom, while functional, did not foster the kind of learning environment needed for a subject as dynamic as DA.

This prompted a rethinking of pedagogy. In reflecting on the challenges of online teaching, the instructor explored alternative approaches that could offer more flexibility and foster greater interaction. Bailenson (2021) highlights how prolonged synchronous video interactions can lead to cognitive fatigue, and suggests that alternative, asynchronous methods may alleviate this burden. It was within this context that TikTok, a short-form video platform widely used by students was considered as a potential pedagogical tool. Initially used for entertainment and informal communication, TikTok's format offered possibilities for concise, creative, and visually engaging content delivery. More importantly, it was already a part of students' daily digital practices.

The idea was not simply to use TikTok as a novelty or trend, but to explore its potential for meaningful teaching and learning. Could a platform design for quick, digestible content be adapted to communicate complex linguistic concepts? Could it support critical engagement, reflection, and collaborative meaning-making? These were the questions that guided the pedagogical shift.

This chapter narrates the journey of integrating TikTok into the teaching of DA during a time of crisis and disruption. It presents the rationale behind the pedagogical decisions, describes the process of implementation, and reflects on the impact of this approach on student learning and engagement. In doing so, the chapter aims to contribute to

broadener conversations on innovative teaching practices in linguistics and language education, particularly in digital and post-pandemic contexts.

By documenting this experience, we offer insights into how digital platforms, when thoughtfully integrated can enhance the teaching of complex subjects. This chapter positions TikTok not merely as a tool for engagement, but as a space for academic exploration, critical thinking, and reimagined pedagogical practice.

9.2 TIKTOK, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND EDUCATION

This section examines: (1) The utilisation of social media, (2) The advantages associated with social media, and (3) The instructional and educational features of TikTok.

9.2.1 Social Media in Teaching and Learning

The integration of digital technology into education has been a gradual yet transformative process. Over the past two decades, social media, once perceived solely as platforms for entertainment and personal connection have steadily found their place in educational contexts. As Smith (2017) notes, innovative digital technologies such as social media have become an integral part of teaching and learning across various disciplines and levels of education.

While the first recognised social networking site was launched as early as 1997, it was not until the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies in the early 2000s that social media began to flourish in both scope and usage (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The year 2004 marked a turning point; the launch of platforms such as Facebook set the stage for widespread participation in online communities. These platforms introduced new ways for users to communicate, collaborate, and share content—functions that would later prove to have significant pedagogical value.

Mao (2014) provides a useful definition of social media as “new technologies and applications that utilise the internet and allow users to create and participate in various communities through functions such as