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Book Review

Social Media and Language Learning: Using TikTok and Instagram

Reviewed by
Colum Ruane
columruane@cityu.edu.mo
City University of Macau

Book Authored by Yeong-Ju Lee.
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Yeong-Ju Lee's Social Media and Language Learning: Using TikTok and Instagram provides a timely analysis of how digital platforms are revolutionising language learning beyond the classroom. As informal language learning practices become more ubiquitous and widespread, Lee offers a theoretical framework and a practical roadmap for exploiting the educational potential of social media platforms. The book has a clear structure, a robust empirical approach, and actionable recommendations for teachers and researchers.

Summary of Content and Structure

The book is organised into five concise and accessible chapters. In the introduction, Lee describes her research motivations, followed by an explanation of a dual-level qualitative research design. This design comprises a comparative content analysis of 400 public posts from TikTok and Instagram, evenly split across both platforms, and a multiple-case study of five international English language learners living in Australia. This establishes the foundation for a study that moves from a macro perspective on platform affordances to the micro perspective of individual learner experiences using the TikTok and Instagram platforms.

Chapter 2 synthesises relevant literature pertaining to Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), and ecological and spatial perspectives. Key concepts such as agency, multimodality, digital literacies, and learning affordances are clearly described. This is accompanied by three research questions that provide direction for the book: How does language learning occur through the

multimodal and spatial affordances of Instagram and TikTok? How do learners organise digital language learning within everyday life? How can teachers support informal digital learning through reflective formal teaching? Lee also expertly outlines how the book adapts Benson's (2021) concept of 'a language learning environment' to employ a 'spatial view' as its theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 presents findings from the comparative content analysis of social media content across the two platforms. Lee illustrates how TikTok's audiovisual and algorithmic features can support pronunciation practice while Instagram aids in grammar and idiom learning through combinations of carousels and image-text overlays. Lee's analysis also demonstrates how platform features, such as hashtags, can be creatively used for content discovery and network building, and highlights the emergence of transnational learning communities across the platforms.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the multiple-case study on five international students learning English. Drawing on journal entries, interviews, and social media posts, Lee explores how the participants incorporate digital practices into their English learning on a daily basis. The chapter identifies five themes that capture how the participants utilise Instagram and TikTok for digital language learning. These range from content curation, real-life language searches, mobile learning, reflective content creation, and blending digital learning with daily life. Lee employs a spatial perspective to analyse each theme, showing how English learning occurs in various places and is adaptable to the different environments in a learner's everyday life.

Chapter 5 synthesises the main findings, discusses the value of adopting a spatial/ecological perspective in analysing contemporary language learning practices, and offers actionable suggestions for teachers and researchers. Lee's pedagogical recommendations include classroom strategies that aim to integrate out-of-class digital engagement with formal language instruction.

Aims and Audience

The book's aims are multifaceted, serving both an educational and academic audience. Through clear examples, it deepens our understanding of how informal language learning arises through the multimodal and spatial affordances offered on the Instagram and TikTok platforms. While outlining how technological resources can support users to learn a target language, it explores how English learners in particular can appropriate and organise digital affordances to expand their learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom into the wider environments of their everyday lives. Secondly, Lee provides teachers and researchers with practical pedagogical guidelines and strategies for incorporating informal digital practices into formal educational settings, making the target audience for this book broad and diverse. It is, therefore, suitable for language practitioners at all levels, including teachers in language education, TESOL and applied linguistics professionals, established and emerging researchers in areas related to CALL and MALL, as well as curriculum developers. The book's clear organisation and practical focus are accessible for newcomers, while its theoretical and methodological depth will appeal to established scholars.

Critical Evaluation

Lee's combination of spatial and ecological perspectives on the use of technology for English language learning is a standout aspect of this book. This approach changes the focus from technology as merely a tool to technology as an affordance and a living space where language learning can and does occur. Lee's method captures the complicated and ever-changing relationship between digital and physical learning spaces, and shows how English learning is becoming more spread out, mobile, and based on where you are, i.e., language learning environments can be uniquely constructed by the learner with the use of digital mobility. The empirical data presented in the book are robust. In the examination of TikTok and Instagram content, concrete examples of how learners turn entertainment features into learning resources and affordances are used. The ethnographic case studies give insightful nuanced perspectives into individual learner journeys. The focus on agency, creativity, and the participatory nature of digital learning is particularly useful as it demonstrates that learners are active in their learning environments rather than passive recipients.

Lee's focus on actionable pedagogy is another notable highlight of the book. Across Chapters 3 and 4, Lee offers clear, adaptable strategies that teachers can implement quickly, such as creating digital genre awareness, designing pronunciation tasks inspired by social media, or using spatial mapping technology to connect digital content with physical environments. These recommendations offer realistic ways of linking students' informal digital practices with classroom instruction.

While the book's strengths are numerous, a critical review should also acknowledge some inherent limitations. As a qualitative five-participant case study focusing on English learners in Australia, the scope of the findings, while rich in depth, may be limited in generalisability. Also, social media platforms are ever-evolving – this means that certain features might or inevitably change over time, necessitating continuous updates in research. Nonetheless, Lee addresses this in the final chapter by stressing the adaptability of the applied theoretical framework and emphasises the *processes* for adaptation, repurposing, and creative learning that apply across diverse languages and contexts, making the theoretical insights more enduring. The focus is on evolving dynamic learning and not specific platform features.

Potential Usefulness of the Book

Language teachers and curriculum designers will find this book helpful to situate social media's place in contemporary language education by offering practical strategies to engage students in language learning on easily accessible digital platforms. Teachers will find strategies on how to harness students' existing digital habits for authentic language use, to promote autonomy, and create multimodal activities to stimulate students' learning creativity. Curriculum designers will value the insights provided in the book to inform the design of more relevant and authentic language learning materials and programmes that reflect the everyday environments of language learners. Lee's emphasis on merging informal with formal learning environments aligns with contemporary pedagogy best practices and is the core standout feature of the book.

For researchers, Lee offers an innovative spatial/ecological framework and methodological approach for conducting future digital language learning studies. The breadth and depth of the literature review and identification of research gaps provide an excellent foundation for further studies into this area. Novice researchers in particular will find this book approachable and very informative, given the clear writing, logical organisation, and use of real-world examples to ground the theory.

In sum, Social Media and Language Learning: Using TikTok and Instagram by Yeong-Ju Lee is a timely and insightful contribution to English language education and to the fields of CALL and MALL. Lee blends theoretical innovation, empirical depth, and practical advice on how digital platforms provide ample digital affordances for English language learning. The book advances our academic understanding of informal digital language learning and provides a vital roadmap for educators navigating the ever-evolving opportunities provided by social media for language learning. Lee's book is essential reading for teachers, researchers, and anyone interested in multimodal pedagogy of English language education.

References

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Colum Ruane is an Assistant Professor at the City University of Macau, with a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Macquarie University. His research focuses on language ideology, multilingualism, English Medium Instruction, and language anxiety. He has forthcoming works on interpreter anxiety, AI use, and Chinese L2 identity. He is co-editing a volume on language in post-handover Macau. (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3676-9933)