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Introduction

There is a definite change in how we communicate nowadays as compared to the past. This is heavily due to the existence and prevalence of social media that has allowed individuals and large corporations to disseminate news and information in such a quick and easy manner to a large audience. Interaction has also been much faster amongst people due to people owning a smartphone or just because of the large amounts of media we are exposed to from a day-to-day basis. Social media and technology have given regular civilians to turn into an overnight star or even an influencer just by uploading a post, photo or even a video.

Pew Research Centre (2019) provided a fact sheet on the topic of social media and highlighted how “Young adults were among the earliest [...], but usage by older adults have increased in recent years”. It is evident how social media has impacted a wide range of audiences, especially across the different age groups. Not only that, with the rise of social media, there is even the term “social media creators”. These creators provide entertainment to their viewers and followers on different platforms; be it through the means of vlogging, photos or even tweets (Craig & Cunningham, 2019). Through these efforts, they are able to garner an audience and even earn an income at the same time.

A mobile application that has been trending in recent years is TikTok, where users are able to upload short-form mobile videos (TikTok, 2020). Douyin is a short-video application launched in 2016 by a Beijing-based company called ByteDance. In 2017, Douyin expanded beyond China under the name of Tiktok (Doyle, 2020). The application allows one to choose from a plethora of sounds and song snippets as well as use special effects and filters (Janes, 2019). There is also a choice to add videos directly from your phone’s gallery. Users are also able to upload duets and record their reactions. TikTok allows users to create challenges, dance videos, lip-synching videos, funny videos and many more and share them with their followers or even to the public within 60 seconds.

In November 2018, Tiktok reported that there were 680 million monthly users (Doyle, 2020). The application has an estimate of around 800 million people who use Tiktok actively on a monthly basis. The majority of their audience are from the ages 16-34 (60%) and following that, ages 25-44 (26%).

Properties of TikTok

Crystal (2006) has highlighted communication between the sender and recipient will be linguistically limited due to the Internet software and the hardware that connects them. Using the framework by Crystal to compare the nature of spoken and written language, the linguistic properties of TikTok will be examined in the following table.

<i>Speech-like</i>	<i>Text-like</i>
Time-bound	Space-bound
Spontaneous	Contrived
Face-to-face	Visually decontextualised
Loosely structured	Elaborately structured
Socially interactive	Factually communicative
Immediately revisable	Repeatedly revisable
Prosodically rich	Graphically Rich

Table 1: Comparison in speech-like and text-like language of TikTok

Based on Table 1, one can tell that TikTok is relatively text-like. However, there are speech-like qualities that the platform possesses which highlights how it encompasses both the properties.

The interaction on TikTok is not time-bound. Users can upload as and when they like without needing an immediate response from the viewers. Comments and feedback do not have to come from a specific audience nor is it directed to a certain addressee in mind as TikTok users tend to upload just to express themselves or to have a good laugh. Users have the choice to react, like, comment and share the content on their own accord. However, it is transient. This means that one has the liberty to delete his uploads and people's comments from their posts by simply clicking the option "delete" after pressing on the comment. The uploaders of TikTok are usually distant from the viewer and the audience tends to be rather vague. The majority of the comments and posts found can be read and watched repeatedly at any point in time. Users can search for the desired account or challenge through the discover section on the application, highlighting how the TikTok is permanent and space-bound due to the accessibility function.

TikTok videos are usually contrived and lack spontaneity. There is a time-lag between the production and reception of a post. There is a process that takes place when it comes to uploading a video and likewise while watching. While making a TikTok video, users are allowed to plan and construct what they would like to post. In the process of making, the user has the freedom to reshoot, delete a certain segment or add filters and sounds while doing a certain snippet. Videos that usually trend on TikTok tend to have individuals lip-synching to a song or even an audio from other users or shows. This makes TikTok videos repeatedly revisable to a large extent. Viewers of the videos are not aware of the bad takes and the original inspiration of the video. Nonetheless, it is immediately revisable as the video or content could have been saved or recorded by the viewers despite the attempt to delete the post or comment. The consequences of uploading a controversial video have to be faced by the user and his actions cannot be withdrawn nor can it be forgotten.

Unlike the usual face-to-face interaction, many TikTok users (also known as TikTokers) learn the words to an audio before-hand or even compose their scripts if they choose to upload their content. In real-time, an individual requires the time and effort to string their thoughts together before speaking. This usually ends in long utterances or even pauses to provide them allowance to think. However, this is not the case for TikTok or other social media platforms that have the option to upload videos. TikTokers are allowed to stop and resume recording, depending on their content and audio. It is more organized and compact in terms of expressing themselves.

TikTok has a lack of visual contact – both the uploader and the viewer are not able to express their feedback immediately or context clearly to one another. Though there is an inability to provide an immediate response, users can duet another user’s video and provide a visual representation of their comment instead of the usual text-like manner as shown in Figure 1. They can react, continue and even poke fun at the other TikToker’s video, as it is playing. Users are given the choice to make their account public or private and this might affect the feedback that they receive; whether it is existent or not. There is a lack of dietic expressions, and the lexicon of speech is characteristically vague as they are not able to refer to the object or topic in person. However, with duets and the option shared (as shown in Fig. 1), it allows a group of people to refer to the person or object directly and with ease.

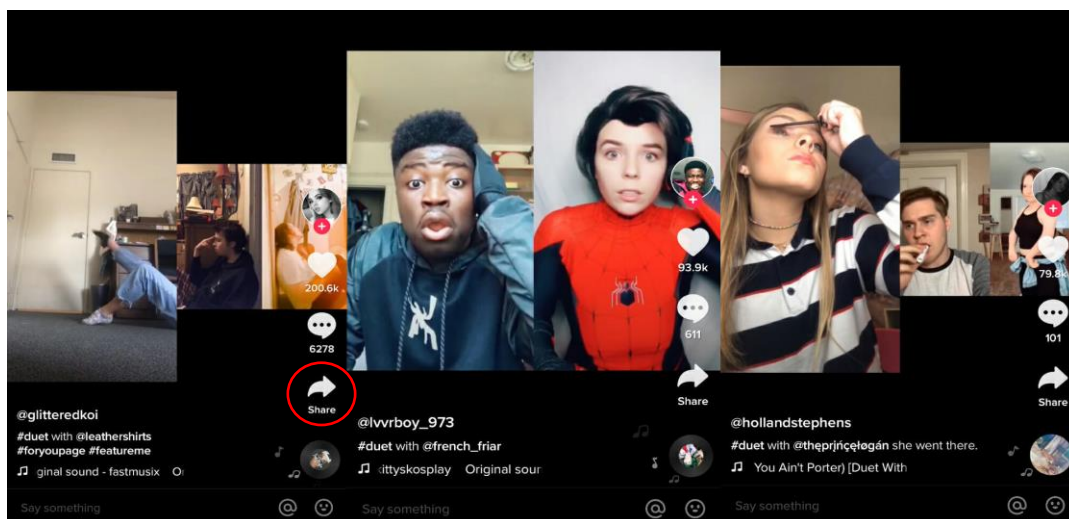


Figure 1: Duets on TikTok

Through the comment section, we are able to see the characteristics of speech despite it being in written form. Comments are majority written informally and are loosely structured. It is rare to see elaborately structured comments on TikTok as compared to informal speech. The use of contractions (shouldn’t, she’ll), nonsense vocabulary, emoticons and, word lengthening are ever so commonly seen not only in the comment section but also in the uploader’s caption and even texts found in the videos themselves. Internet slangs are also a trend that can be found on this platform as seen in Table 2. When using the slangs, it is common to either toggle with the cases or to capitalize the whole word. In a way, users are expressing the way they would say it – be it in a joking manner or an angry manner.

Slang/Acronym	Meaning
Periodt.	A colloquial way of saying period. Often used to end a discussion or debate
IRL	In real life
LMAO	Laughing my ass off

Table 2: Internet slang and acronyms commonly seen on TikTok

TikTok has its own set of acronyms that can be found in captions of videos, especially the hashtag #fyp which stands for #foryoupage as seen in Figure 2. The point of this hashtag is so that the user is able to appear on the “For You Page” of a viewer’s application and gather the views and publicity they desire.

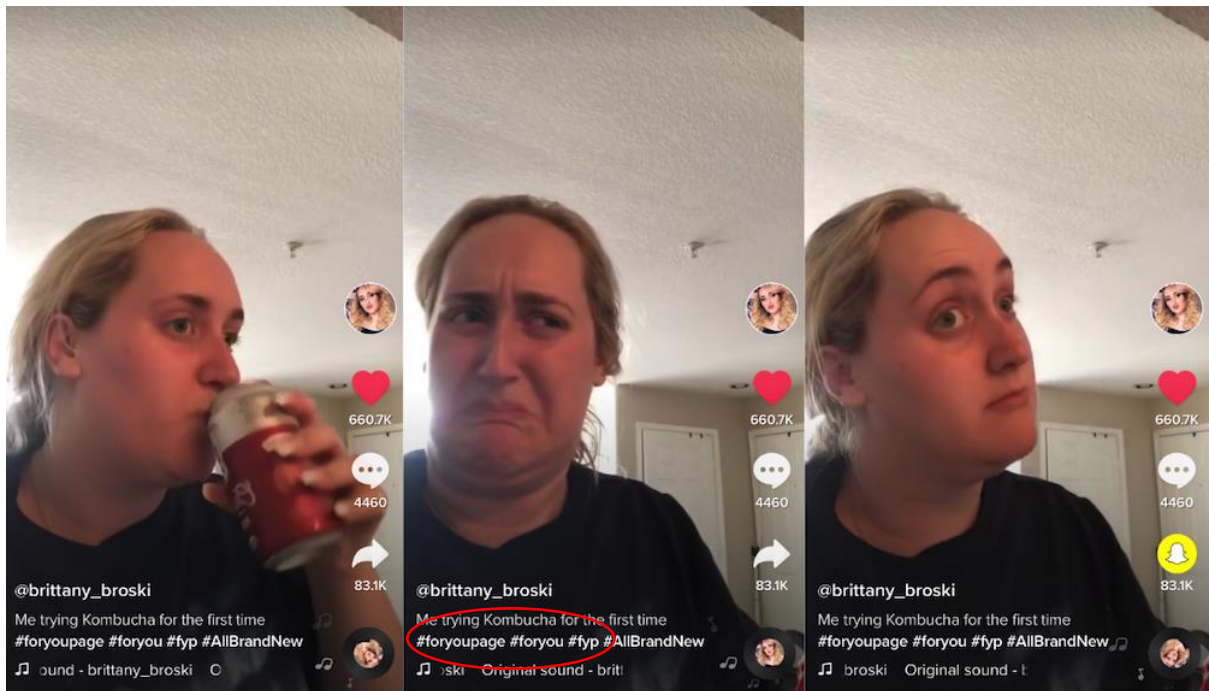


Figure 2: Use of #fyp and #foryoupage in TikTok video captions

With the variety and different uses of the slangs and other speech-like writing, whatever TikTok users post tends to be less monotonous and more expressive; similar to interacting with someone in real life.

TikTok is can be both socially interactive and factually communicative. Some TikTok users share facts, hacks, and knowledge with their viewers. Videos such as “How to make a mug cake” and “Countries with the highest IQs” can be found as you scroll through the

application. These informative videos allow the viewer to learn and absorb knowledge in a visual manner. On the other hand, TikTok is rather phatic and social in nature. Phatic (also known as small talk) is “the nonreferential use of language to share feelings or establish a mood of sociability rather than to communicate information” (Nordquist, 2019). It is not unusual to see videos that start with “How are you?” or ending with “Have a good week!” on TikTok. There will not be an immediate response but the attempt of striking a conversation with the viewer shows how the platform practices a rather casual and unplanned discourse. This could be a result of incorporating day-to-day habits into the videos or even seeing their audience members as peers thus, striking such types of conversation and encouraging conversation in possibly the comment section or through duetting the video. The platform displays a plethora of personal opinions and attitudes from the users and has nuances that are expressed through facial expressions and non-verbal cues as they can record themselves.

Only videos can be uploaded on TikTok, it makes the messages predominantly visual. The interaction and emotions on this application are highly reliant on facial expressions and both verbal and non-verbal cues. Therefore, it makes the platform both graphically and prosodically rich. TikTok is graphically rich as it is spatially organised, and the majority of its graphic conventions do not relate to prosody. Different sections can be found at the bottom of the application (when using a smartphone or a tablet) which consists of home, discover, record, inbox, and profile.

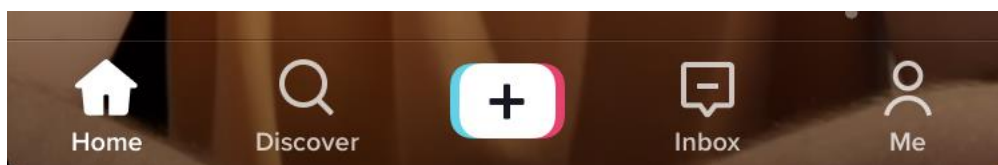


Figure 3: Different sections of the TikTok

These labels are coupled with images that represent the sections; except for record where only a “+” can be seen as shown in Figure 3.

Conclusion

It is shocking how TikTok attracts a large group of audience, especially the youth. It is a platform that allows individuals to be creative and encouraged them to explore their

creativity from a young age. Despite being a platform that allows users to post strictly videos, it is able to possess both speech-like and text-like properties. However, it does lean more towards text-like as it is an online platform. TikTok influences our language both on the application as well as in real-time. The platform has allowed people from all walks of life to educate and humour one another through visual and interactive means.

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