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**für Bachelorstudiengänge
im deutschsprachigen Raum**

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汉语教学

Chinese Language Teaching

**in Bachelor's Programs
at Universities in German-Speaking Countries**

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Exploring the Integration of Chinese Social Media in Dutch TCFL Classrooms

YANG Zhaole 杨兆乐 and ZHANG Yinzi 章因之

1 Introduction

1.1 Social Media in Language Teaching and Learning

In today's world, social media has become indispensable for people to access news and information, connect with others, entertain themselves, and engage in e-commerce. According to Manca (2020), social media include various internet-based applications facilitating all sorts of networking functionalities, such as sharing images or short videos (e.g., Instagram), curating content or information (e.g., Pinterest), exchanging instant text/voice/video messages (e.g., WhatsApp), or using applications with a combination of all functions (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). China is no exception to this global trend. As of December 2023, official statistics indicate that the number of netizens in China has reached 1.092 billion. Among them, 97.7% use short-video apps such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) or Kuaishou, and 97% engage with one of the instant messaging apps (e.g., Weixin or QQ).¹

Due to its inherently social and interactive nature, social media also provides a valuable potential environment for language learning. The integration of social media into second and foreign language teaching has gained significant attention, with a growing body of research advocating its positive impact (Lomicka and Lord 2016; Reinhardt 2019; Barrot 2022). The advantages of incorporating social networking sites (SNS) into language education are not confined to one of the following aspects: Social media immerses students in authentic linguistic contexts and real-world language use, exposing them to diverse linguistic repertoires that facilitate language learning through observation (Reinhardt and Zander 2011; Androutsopoulos 2014). Furthermore, social media environments can potentially boost students' motivation and interest in learning the target language (Chartrand 2012; Lomicka and Lord 2019). Meanwhile, by offering a set of affordances for interacting and socializing with native speakers or fellow students, social media can enhance students' communication skills through collaborative and participatory activities (Siemens and Weller 2011). Moreover, these digital spaces offer rich opportunities for acquiring pragmatic competence because they provide access to contextualized examples of language use, social and discourse information. This further facilitates fostering students' intercultural and sociopragmatic awareness and competence (Reinhardt and Zander 2011; Lantz-Andersson 2018; Reinhardt 2019).

1 The data here are from CNNIC's 53rd Statistic Report on China's Internet Development (2024).

1.2 Existing Research and Research Questions

Despite the apparent benefits of adopting social media in language teaching and learning, Barrot (2022), in his extensive review, points out that the existing research primarily focuses on English as the target language, with sparse attention directed towards other languages. Moreover, the majority of studies tend to concentrate on Western platforms like Facebook and Twitter. As Jin (2018) also observes, research on the use of Chinese social media in the context of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) remains scarce. The limited existing research primarily explores the use of Chinese social media within China and informal extracurricular settings. For instance, Diao (2014) examines the use of Weibo by two American college students during a study abroad program in Shanghai, while Jin (2018) investigated the use of Weixin (Wechat) by American college students in Shanghai during a summer program, from an ecological and sociocultural standpoint. There is a notable absence of research integrating Chinese social media into TCFL within European higher education contexts and formal classroom settings.

Moreover, most existing research on the linguistic aspects of Chinese social media takes a sociolinguistic approach. Some studies discuss the discursive strategies employed by social media users to challenge official narratives or mobilize online activism (e.g., Gleiss 2015; Feng and Wu 2018; Wu and Montgomery 2020; Sandel and Wang 2022). Others have explored users' creative use of linguistic and semiotic resources to circumvent censorship or create additional expressive effects (e.g., Ren 2018; Ren and Guo 2020; Zhang and Ren 2020; Teng and Chan 2022; see the review by Fitzgerald, Sandel, and Wu 2022). However, little attention has been paid to the linguistic characteristics of Chinese social media from the perspectives of language teaching and learning, as well as their potential integration into the TCFL curriculum. This oversight is striking, considering the current role of Chinese social media in the daily communication of Chinese individuals. It is also regrettable that the rich linguistic resources available on these social media platforms, which could be highly beneficial for learning Chinese, remain untapped.

Based on our empirical experience teaching a Chinese course centered on the language used in Chinese social media at a Dutch university, this study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the integration of Chinese social media in TCFL within a higher education setting. This research will first investigate the linguistic features exhibited by users on popular platforms like Sina Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin. The study seeks to identify language and communicative elements relevant to TCFL instruction by examining data from our own teaching corpus. On this basis, the research will offer practical pedagogical insights and recommendations, encompassing aspects such as course design considerations (e.g., challenges of integrating Chinese social media into formal classroom settings, defining feasible course objectives) and implementation strategies (e.g., teaching activities). Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the

existing body of knowledge within the context of Computer-Assisted Language Learning by investigating the viability of incorporating Chinese social media into TCFL in a specific local context and addressing both its positive outcomes and the inherent limitations associated with this approach.

2 Adaptation of Linguistic and Pragmatic Elements on Social Media for TCFL

The linguistic repertoires used for digital communication on social networking stands out from conventional spoken or written repertoires due to the interplay between diverse socializing purposes such as sharing, community building, and self-expression, as well as the unique technological affordances (e.g., multimodal semiotic resources such as emoticons, graphics and videos) and regulatory factors (e.g., platform-specific guidelines and government censorship). As suggested by Androutsopoulos (2014), traditional frameworks for categorizing linguistic repertoires, based on modalities of language use such as spoken and written, or situation types such as formal or informal, are inadequate for capturing the complexities of digital language practice. For instance, posts, reposts and responses on social media platforms like X/Twitter or Xiaohongshu are often presented in written form, but exhibit features typical of socially embedded vernacular speech. Furthermore, Chinese social media has fostered a distinctive internet culture and landscape, which shaped collectively by the linguistic affordances of the Chinese language (e.g., the use of Chinese characters) and by its strict censorship policies (Fitzgerald, Sandel, and Wu 2022; Sandel and Wang 2022). However, these features and regulatory pressure do not always lead to reduced user activity; on the contrary, people have witnessed rapid innovation and the emergence of dynamic platforms such as Weixin, Douyin, Bilibili and Xiaohongshu, among others. Meanwhile, Chinese internet users have shown remarkable creativity in online communications to attract attention, enhance expressive power, or bypass censorship. The vibrant linguistic creativity displayed by Chinese netizens on these platforms underscores the need for a more systematic examination of their language practices. Viewed through the lens of L2 language learning, the linguistic landscape provided by the informal space of social media serves as a valuable and authentic source for language acquisition, complementing traditional materials-based textbooks in classroom settings.

In this section, we examine some key characteristics of the linguistic resources used by Chinese social media users. Our analysis is grounded in teaching materials curated from posts and comments sourced from four prominent Chinese social media platforms: Sina Weibo, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Bilibili.² Using a teaching corpus ac-

2 Based on information from Wikipedia and Baidu Baike 百度百科 and some other authors (see below), we provide here a very brief introduction to the Chinese social media platforms we often use: 1) Sina

accumulated over several years, we analyze the linguistic properties from two different layers: the lexical layer and the speech act/discourse layer. Based on these findings, we offer pedagogical strategies for incorporating these elements into TCFL curricula.

2.1 A Broad Spectrum of Vocabulary

One of the most prominent features of linguistic expressions on Chinese social media is the prevalence of numerical internet slang, crafted through the creative use of various semiotic resources across multiple modes, including both linguistic and non-linguistic elements such as color, graphics, and videos (Zhang and Ren 2020; Teng and Chan 2022). There are several strategies for online linguistic innovation. One commonly used strategy involves the adoption of Pinyin acronyms as linguistic shortcuts to effectively convey meaning and emotions while cleverly navigating censorship constraints through humor and creation. Pinyin acronyms are commonly employed to substitute “taboo languages, expletives, and politically sensitive terms” (Chen 2014). For instance, the letter “K” is often used to replace the commonly used F-word (*cào* or *kào*) in digital communication (Ren 2018). Similarly, various Pinyin acronyms are used to alternate with the derogatory terms, thereby softening the tone of discourse or circumventing internet surveillance. Although our corpus contains numerous additional examples, we have selected a few below.

- (1) CNM: *cào nǐ mā* 肏你妈 (or 操你妈), lit. “fuck your mother”
- (2) SB: *shǎbī* 傻逼, lit. “stupid idiot”
- (3) MLGB: *mā-le-ge bī* 妈了个逼 (or 马勒戈壁), lit. “your mother's fucking cunt”

Weibo or Weibo 新浪微博, launched in 2009, is one of the most popular social media platforms featuring X (formerly Twitter)-like microblogging. Weibo is a major hub for breaking news and trending topics, with engaging comment sections that reflect a wide range of public opinions, often involving emotional expressions. We found most of our user comments on this platform; 2) Xiaohongshu 小红书, also known as Little Red Book, Red, and RedNote, founded in 2013, is a Chinese social media app that can be seen as China's counterpart to Instagram, where users share visual content, including photography, short videos, and live-streaming of shopping experiences, lifestyle tips, and travel stories. Due to its easy accessibility compared to other Chinese social media, it has gained popularity not only in mainland China but also attracts other global Sinophone audiences (cf. Morris and Cong 2024). Notably, in early 2025, following the ban on TikTok in the US, a wave of overseas users migrated to Xiaohongshu, sparking the “TikTok refugee” trend; 3) Douyin 抖音, TikTok's Chinese counterpart, launched in 2016, and has quickly become China's most popular short video-sharing platform, thanks to its powerful algorithm and creative tools like music, filters, and special effects; 4) Bilibili 哔哩哔哩, founded in 2010, serves as a video-sharing platform with special attention to anime, manga, and gaming content. A distinctive feature of this app is that users can post overlaying comments, referred to as *danmu* 弹幕, which serves as a real-time commentary subtitle system that syncs comments to a specific playback time in the video (cf. Lu 2020: 18-20; Fitzgerald, Sandel, and Wu 2022).

As a linguistic economy strategy, Pinyin acronyms are used not only for profanity or sensitive content but also to replace internet slang or idiomatic expressions. One commonly encountered example is “YYDS”, which abbreviates the internet slang *yǒngyuǎn de shén* 永远的神, literally meaning “forever god”. This phrase is used to express very strong admiration or praise and is frequently observed on Chinese social media, such as on Bilibili *Dànmù*.

Furthermore, Chinese social media users often combine the Chinese writing systems, i.e., the Chinese characters, with Pinyin acronyms to create new scripts that incorporate elements from various writing systems (Wei and Hua 2019). This is illustrated in (4), a phrase often used for praise, similar to saying “fucking awesome”, and (5), a phrase humorously or sarcastically referring to ordinary individuals in a relatively low social status position:

(4) 牛 B: niúbī 牛逼 (or 牛比), lit. “cow cunt”

(5) P 民: pímín 屁民, lit. “fart people”

Another commonly used strategy for crafting new internet phrases, whether to bypass online filtering systems or to inject humor or cuteness, involves playful language with homophones using various linguistic resources (Wang 2012; Zhang 2017; Wei and Hua 2019). For example, social media users frequently substitute homophonic Chinese characters for standard ones, creating a relaxed and endearing tone in communication or engaging in the practice of *màiméng* 卖萌, which means “acting cute”. A typical instance is the recent rise in popularity of the expression *zūn-dū jiǎ-dū* 尊嘟假嘟, replacing the phrase *zhēn-de jiǎ-de* 真的假的 (lit. “Real or fake?”) to convey surprise with a hint of playfulness and jest. Similarly, social media users also employ phonetically similar English words or Arabic numerals to replace part of the Chinese saying, as illustrated in (6), where using *skr* from English rap songs serves as a phonetic substitution for *sǐ-gè* 死个 (lit. “deadly”) (Zhang and Ren 2020), and in (7), where the repetition of the numeral 6 expresses praise or approval, phonetically replacing the dialectal praising phrase *liù* 溜 (lit. “awesome, cool”). Using numbers, just like Pinyin acronyms, enables internet users to quickly and economically express their feelings, which is perfect for situations where text length is restricted, such as Bilibili *Dànmù* or Weibo posts.

(6) 笑 skr 人: xiào skr rén 笑死人, “So funny that it’s killing me”, “Hilarious”

(7) 666 : liù liù liù 六六六, “Awesome!”, “Impressive!”, “Well done!”

Meanwhile, internet slang or online neologisms, while often associated with linguistic innovation, don’t always involve new forms. Many internet expressions appear solely in plain text, yet carry rich references, for instance, drawn from historical anecdotes, local or popular culture, trendy social phenomena, or news events, and specific professions or social groups (Eble 2009). While some internet slangs enjoy a brief period of popularity among certain groups before fading away, others become part of everyday language. As

such, they can also serve as up-to-date and practical vocabulary for Chinese learners, much like modern *chengyu* “set phrase”. A key challenge lies in interpreting their meanings, as these terms often cannot be understood literally. Decoding them typically requires extensive contextual information and familiarity with local nuances (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska and Shalevska 2018). Here are a few examples that show the importance of contextual information in understanding it:

Internet Slangs in Chinese and Pinyin	Literal meaning	Contextual Meaning
(8) zhái zhai / zhái nán 宅男 / zhái nǚ 宅女	House/house man/house woman	<i>Zhái</i> can function as a verb or adjective meaning “staying at home.” The <i>zhái wénhuà</i> 宅文化 (homebody culture,) which parallels Japanese <i>otaku</i> culture, often refers to a lifestyle and sub-culture characterized by people spending most of their time indoors, typically engaging in hobbies like anime, manga, video games, and internet activities. Occasionally, it can also have a negative connotation, suggesting social withdrawal. (cf. Pan 2020)
(9) fóxi 佛系	Buddha approach	Fóxi originates from the Japanese term Bukkake 仏系, which translates to “Buddha-like” or “Buddhist approach”. In Chinese internet slang, it refers to a laid-back or zen attitude toward life, often associated with the mindset of not stressing over things and going with the flow. (cf. Zhou, Chen, and Cai 2017)
(10) nèi juǎn 内卷	introvert roll	<i>Nèi juǎn</i> refers to a phenomenon in which individuals within a group compete intensely with one another, often harming their own well-being. It is often linked to excessive competition and overwork in certain industries or social circles. (cf. Koetse 2021)
(11) tǎng-píng 躺平	lying flat	<i>Tǎng-píng</i> emerged from a social movement in China that advocates for a minimalist lifestyle while rejecting societal pressures to constantly seek success or achievement. It represents a choice to opt out of the competitive rat race and embrace a simpler, less stressful way of life (cf. Brant 2021)
(12) pò-fáng 破防	break the defense or resistance	Pò-fáng originally refers to breaking through an opponent’s defense in a game. Now, it denotes experiencing a strong emotional impact after encountering certain events or information, feeling deeply touched inside, and having one’s psychological defense broken. (cf. Baidu baike-破防 [“broken defense”])
(13) zhí-nán-ái 直男癌 癌	“straight male cancer”	<i>Zhí-nán-ái</i> refers to stereotypically masculine behaviors or attitudes that are seen as toxic or problematic, such as sexism, machismo, or insensitivity. (cf. Baidu baike-直男癌 [“straight male cancer”])
(14) zhí-de 直的 / wān-de 弯的	“straight”; “bent”	These terms are often used in LGBTQ+ communities in China to describe sexual orientations and gender identities. (cf. ShuoShuo Chinese 2020)

To understand (8) and (9), it is helpful to be familiar with the subculture of */zhái wénhuà* 宅文化 (lit. “homebody culture”) and *Fóxi qīngnián* 佛系青年 (lit. “Buddha-like youth”) and their worldview and life philosophy in China or East Asia. Understanding (10) and (11) requires awareness of the wide anxiety experienced by young Chinese people shaped by China’s competitive work culture and how many of young people push back against the toxic working culture. The meaning of (12) comes from online gaming communities, while grasping (13) and (14) requires background knowledge about gender issues and the language used within China’s LGBTQ+ communities (cf. Wu 2020). In short, these terms cannot be understood solely from their literal meaning since contextual references matter a lot for interpreting these words. It is worth noting that many popular internet slangs evolve through entextualization, i.e., detaching from their original context and taking on new meaning and usages as they spread (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73; Androutsopoulos 2014). (12) serves as an exemplar of this phenomenon: the phrase’s original meaning of “breaking the defense” in gaming contexts has evolved and been recontextualized in emotional contexts, referring to a mental or emotional breakdown.

Earlier we discussed creative and unique aspects of the language used on Chinese social media. These creative elements are not limited to plain text; they are often presented on social media, combined with graphic resources, in the form of image+text or GIF+text combinations, commonly known as memes. The integration of different semiotic resources plays a crucial role in conveying the situational meaning of internet slang within the given context. Below, we provide two examples from the WeChat meme packs, or *biǎoqíng bāo* 表情包:



(15) Meme of *tāng-píng*



(16) Meme of *pò-fáng*

The last but not least significant characteristic of the lexicon used on social media is its thematic richness and variety of registers. In terms of content diversity, social media vocabulary covers a wide range of social topics, including politics, economics, culture, societal news, and the perspectives of everyday individuals. Linguistically, social media platforms showcase a diverse range of words from various registers, spanning from formal to informal and from spoken to written language. Researchers are often drawn

to the intriguing linguistic innovations present on social media platforms. However, from the perspective of second language learning, social media provides an ideal environment for students to acquire vocabulary across various registers and relevant to diverse and contemporary topics.

So far, we have identified three categories of lexical words that are distinct in the social media landscape: 1) a large number of theme-specific terms, 2) internet neologisms featuring linguistic innovation, and 3) internet slang rich in cultural and contextual references. These words are often excluded from traditional textbooks; therefore, a course focused on social media presents opportunities for students to acquire vocabulary that closely relates to societal changes and real-world topics. In addition to the unique features at the vocabulary level, the social media context also provides a substantial corpus and exhibition space for various speech acts in the discourse, which we will explore in section 2.2.

2.2 A Gallery of Speech Acts

The communication dynamics on social media diverge from face-to-face interactions due to the absence of traditional linguistic cues, such as prosodic devices (e.g., volume, tempo, stress, and intonation), and body language. Nonetheless, scholars have noted a surprisingly rich conversational quality in online interactions, manifested through posting and reposting, likes/dislikes, responses, comments, and so on. The conversationality on social media is largely facilitated and enhanced by an array of technological affordances and multimodal resources such as emoticons, as well as the # and @ functionalities, and graphics (Honeycutt and Herring 2009). Interaction on social media platforms like Twitter or Sina Weibo can also be viewed as a turn-taking practice similar to spoken conversation, although it lacks strict temporal and sequential constraints. For instance, both the initial post and the responsive post can be considered turns from the perspective of Conversation Analysis (Feng and Wu 2018). Online exchanges unfold asynchronously, fostering a communal form of communication characterized by various discursive activities (Wu and Montgomery 2023). In pursuit of various communicative purposes such as sharing, connection, collaboration, expression of agreement or disagreement, self-promotion, and so on, social media users frequently use a variety of impassioned rhetoric and an affective tone to engage their audience in virtual spaces and elicit responses (Burbules 2016). Furthermore, Feng and Wu (2018) highlight similar trends in Chinese social media, where users, to effectively convey messages and provoke responses, frequently employ emotional commentary and a range of rhetorical devices or discursive strategies such as stigmatization, directives, and rhetorical questions.

The rich array of communicative purposes and vibrant language use on Chinese social media platforms offers an ideal environment for examining a spectrum of illocutionary acts or speech acts within the theoretical framework proposed by Austin (1962) and

Searle (1976). Defined by the “illocutionary point,” which denotes the purpose or intention behind speech, Searle (1976) categorizes five major types of illocutionary acts, as outlined in (17):

(17) Five illocutionary acts by Searle

- a. Assertive: Illocutionary acts that commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition, such as stating, claiming, asserting, telling, describing, hypothesizing, insisting, swearing, and boasting.
- b. Directive: Illocutionary acts that attempt to get the addressee to do something, such as requesting, advising, commanding, suggesting, daring, begging, defying, challenging, or inviting.
- c. Commissive: Illocutionary acts that commit the speaker to the future course of action, e.g., vowing to do or to refrain from doing something, undertaking, pledging, threatening, intending, betting, opposing, etc.
- d. Expressive: Illocutionary acts that express the psychological state of the speaker about the proposition, such as apologizing, thanking, welcoming, congratulating, deploring, condoling etc.
- e. Declaration: Illocutionary acts that bring about the state of affairs expressed by the propositional content or change the world via the utterance itself, which equals to Austin’s performative, such as pronouncing someone married, baptizing or christening, blessing, bidding, passing a sentence, or firing someone.

Interestingly, Wu and Montgomery (2023) propose that Searle’s Speech Act theory can be extended beyond spoken discourse to include written texts and multimodal texts on social media platforms (cf. Grundlingh 2018). By examining microblogging discussions surrounding disasters, they have cataloged various speech acts, or “discourse acts” as they term it, such as representatives, expressives, directives, commissives, and eliciting. Their analysis also demonstrates the rich diversity of speech acts used by social media users when discussing a trending topic.

The data from our teaching corpus further reinforces the idea that the Chinese social media landscape provides fertile ground for observing and understanding various speech acts used by native Chinese speakers. Some trending social topics can attract numerous comments from netizens, from which we can easily find enough examples for almost all the major types of speech acts cataloged by Searle. Importantly, the variations provide students with precious opportunities to discover diverse ways of expressing one type of speech act, usually not illustrated by textbooks materials. Here is a concrete example: two altercation incidents in June 2024 between a barista and a customer that occurred at different locations of the same coffee company, Manner Coffee, in Shanghai. These incidents took place on the same day at the same company and quick-

ly went viral on the Chinese internet, as they reflected the toxic working culture and the tension between individuals in a fast-paced and highly competitive society, where young people feel overworked to meet standards, and the internet buzzword *nèijǔān* “involution” is frequently used to describe the seemingly endless rat race. We can easily identify various types of speech acts from the emotive comments of netizens on Weibo and Xiaohongshu in response to this viral topic, as demonstrated in (18):

(18) The display of various speech acts on Chinese social media

Major Speech Acts	Sub-categories	Examples from Weibo and Xiaohongshu
Assertive	stating	Comment 1: 听说早上上班到晚上。工资 5000，点货出品清洁一条龙一个人干呢。每天一个人做 400 杯。[开学季] “I heard the shift goes from morning to night. The salary is 5,000 yuan, and one person does everything – stocking, making drinks, cleaning. One person makes 400 cups a day. [Back-to-school season]”
	asserting	Comment 2: 买咖啡的为啥一定要比做咖啡的态度要好？买咖啡的就不是打工人了？这个社会谁不累啊？“Why is it that coffee buyers are expected to have a better attitude than coffee makers? Aren’t the customers also just workers? Who isn’t tired in this society?”
	hypothesizing	Comment 3: 如果这么团结，就不会有“内卷”这个词！“If people were really united, the word “involution” wouldn’t even exist!”
Directive	advising	Comment 4: 所以说大家都不去那里工作，让他招不到人。[doge] “That’s why no one should go work there – let them fail to hire anyone. [doge]”
	boycotting	Comment 5: 抵制这个破咖啡店吧！“Boycott this crappy coffee shop!”
	requesting	Comment 6: 给员工加工资，合理安排时间，增加人手，这些需要增加成本，但可以长足发展。希望Manner不要目光短浅。“Raise employee wages, arrange working hours reasonably, and hire more staff – these cost more, but lead to long-term growth. I hope Manner isn’t short-sighted.”
	commanding	Comment 7: 来来你过来，让我先泼你一脸再说！“Come here, come on – let me splash water in your face first!”
	challenging	Comment 8: 员工都保护不了，还开什么店，并不是每个顾客是上帝！“If you can’t even protect your staff, why are you running a business? Not every customer is a god!”
Commissive	vowing to do or to refrain from doing something	Comment 9: 呵呵，不保护你员工，绝对不喝你咖啡！！！！ “Ha – if you don’t protect your employees, I’ll absolutely never drink your coffee!!!” Comment 10: 太离谱了 再也不想喝 Manner 了！“This is outrageous. I never want to drink Manner again.”
	pledging	Comment 11: 我们会以此为戒，坚决杜绝此类事件再次发生。 “We will take this as a warning and firmly prevent such incidents from happening again” (response from the coffee shop)

Expressive	sympathizing	Comment 12: 我同情这个工作人员。呜呜好惨。“I feel bad for that employee. Ugh, so miserable.”
	condemning	Comment 13: 滚！“Get lost!” Comment 14: 万恶的资本家！“Evil capitalist!”
	thanking	Comment 15: 我们珍视大家提出的建议，再次感谢大家的监督。 “We value everyone’s feedback – thank you again for holding us accountable.” (response from the coffee shop)
	apologizing	Comment 16: 感谢大家的监督，对公司近日发生咖啡师伙伴与顾客冲突事件，我们深表歉意。“Thank you all for your oversight. We sincerely apologize for the recent incident involving a conflict between a barista and a customer.” (response from the coffee shop)
Declaration		Comment 17: 本人宣布单方面辞退 Manner！！！！“I hereby unilaterally fire Manner!!!!” 单方面宣布永久退出 Manner！ “Unilaterally announcing my permanent departure from Manner”

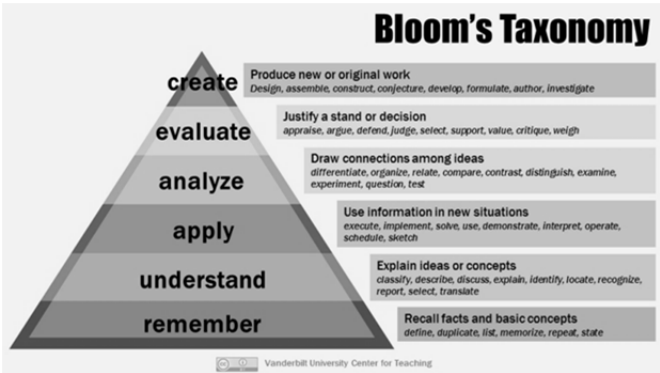
Given the rich diversity of speech acts found in the linguistic resources on Chinese social media, it indicates significant potential for language teachers to utilize these resources to teach pragmatic elements of Chinese and enhance students’ pragmatic abilities. This serves as a valuable complement to traditional classroom teaching, especially considering that traditional textbook materials may not always provide reliable sources of pragmatic input (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig 2001). In section 3, we will offer practical tips for teaching speech acts using materials from social media.

3 Teaching Recommendations

3.1 Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the most important objectives for a course focused on social media. We have previously identified three categories of vocabulary within Chinese social media contexts: theme-specific vocabulary, internet neologisms that involve linguistic innovations, and internet slang rich in contextual references. Given their different characteristics and roles in facilitating communication, it is essential to establish tailored teaching objectives and varied instructional activities. In this section, we discuss the specific teaching objectives for each vocabulary category and provide our recommendations for assignments and class activities, aligning with the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (RBT) framework introduced by Anderson et al. (2001) based on Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956), as shown in (19):

(19) Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (RBT) framework



In (20), we demonstrate the application of the Revised RBT in designing different learner activities to acquire social media vocabulary:

(20) Vocabulary Learning Activities Based on Revised RBT.

RBT Cognitive Process	Learning Activities
Remember: Recall facts and basic concepts; Define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state	1) Review and study the pre-class materials chosen by the teachers. Various types of vocabulary have been typographically marked. 2) Before class, students should prepare their own vocabulary lists, including Pinyin and translations of the selected words. 3) Identify internet slang within the assigned materials.
Understand: Explain ideas or concepts; Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate	
Apply: Use information in new situations; Execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch	4) Guided class retelling: Students view relevant keywords and images on slides. Each student is asked to describe the corresponding scenarios using the keywords. With the teacher's guidance, the entire class synthesizes these components into coherent paragraphs that illustrate relevant social media topics.
Analyze: Draw connections among ideas; Differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test	5) Analyzing slang on social media: Provide students with authentic materials that use internet slang and ask them to analyze and summarize the strategies that form internet neologisms as well as the socio-cultural factors behind these slangs. 6) Group discussion/debate: Students discuss and debate relevant topics, incorporating the pre-class comments they have written (see (10) below). They can express their opinions using new vocabulary, such as supporting or opposing a particular point of view.
Evaluate: Justifying a stand or decision; Appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh.	7) Contextual evaluation and selection: Provide a new context and ask students to describe it using the slang or to complete the sentences by selecting appropriate slang.

Create: Produce new or original work; Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate.	8) Pre-class self-made tweet/Weibo: Students are required to write and submit their own “Weibo” comments before or after class, incorporating topics from the materials and new vocabulary. 9) Headline/hashtag design: Create a news headline or retweet tags that summarize relevant netizen comments or news on related topics. 10) Group report: Investigate and gather information on one of the social media hotspots before class and present the relevant topics during class.
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Now let’s see how this works in practice. Among the three vocabulary categories, the most vibrant and wide-ranging is the rich and varied theme-based vocabulary found across various registers and relevant to diverse trending topics on social media. These real-world topics on social media offer students access to fresh, current, and authentic language that is rarely addressed in textbooks. An illustrative example from our teaching experience highlights a gap between the frequency with which native speakers use *chéngyǔ* (set phrases) online and the limited exposure learners receive to them in standard courses. Naturally, learning *chéngyǔ* can serve as a learning objective on its own, alongside other theme-specific lexicons in a course based on social media. Given the size and importance of this vocabulary group, we recommend prioritizing the instruction of these theme-specific lexicons. However, to achieve this, we believe teachers should design teaching activities that span all levels of RBT cognitive levels, from activities targeting lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering, understanding, and applying, exemplified by (1), (2), and (4) in table 2, to those focusing on higher-order thinking skills like evaluating and creating, as illustrated by (4) and (6) in table 2. This approach ultimately leads to creation, as shown by (8) to (10).

The second category of vocabulary covers internet terms characterized by linguistic innovation in their forms, using elements like homophones, acronyms, numerals, and other inventive twists. While the playful nature and the novelty of these expressions often capture students’ great interest, in practice, their actual application is primarily confined to social media communications. Therefore, from a TCFL perspective, the focus should be more on recognizing and analyzing the formation strategy of such words rather than their active use. Understanding the tricks behind their spelling and structure, i.e., the orthographic and morphological techniques, is crucial for helping students decode their meanings more easily. Moreover, these creative terms also serve pragmatic functions in social media contexts, such as softening the tone, mitigating harshness and embarrassment, or serving as euphemisms for taboo words. Analyzing their formation strategies and pragmatic functions can enhance students’ “metalinguistic awareness” and analytical skills (Bialystok 2001; Roehr-Brackin 2018), helping them to decipher and evaluate new slang encountered across different contexts. As

shown in (5) of table (2), teachers can foster this analytical competence and enhance the language awareness through class activities designed to notice, dissect, and reflect on their formation strategies and the pragmatic functions.

The third category of vocabulary concerns internet slang rich in contextual references, which are difficult to grasp meaning literally. This category of terms often consists of buzzwords on social media and captivates significant interest among students, as their use is often associated with specific social identifications, e.g., words spoken by “young men” (Mattiello 2008), and their rare accessibility through traditional language classes. This high learning motivation is evident from our recent survey findings, in which many students expressed a keen desire to learn more about and delve deeper into internet slang. As discussed earlier, the references infused in these slang terms often revolve around societal hotspots or the nuances of various subcultures and different social groups. From a TCFL perspective, the contextual references of these slang terms can be employed as compelling entry points for teachers to present relevant social or cultural topics, such as gender discussions in China, cultural differences in parent-child relationships, societal pressure on youth, or the impact of AI development. By integrating sociocultural contexts into vocabulary acquisition, not only can students grasp the usages of these phrases in real-world scenarios, but they can also enrich their knowledge and insights into China’s society and culture, thereby enhancing their sociolinguistic and cross-cultural competence. As a result, instructional activities targeting the acquisition of these words should prioritize evaluating contextual factors and lead students to explore the inherent social and cultural dimensions, as exemplified by (7) in table 2.

Furthermore, given the limited tutorial hours, we recommend adopting a flipped classroom approach. Activities targeting lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering and understanding (e.g., learning activities (1) to (3) in Table 2), as well as time-intensive activities like creating tasks (e.g., (8) in Table 2), should be completed by students on their own prior to class, with some guidance from teachers when needed. Specifically, students should study teacher-assigned materials, including reading materials such as journalistic reports on a specific topic, commentary posts from social media users, and relevant images and videos. Important vocabulary can be highlighted through bold, italics, and underlining to capture students’ attention. They will also build their own vocabulary list, including the Pinyin (i.e., the pronunciation) and the translation (i.e., the meaning) of their chosen phrases. Additionally, using words from their self-made vocabulary list, students then create their own “tweet,” i.e., a Weibo comment on this topic. Coming to class with this prepared vocabulary and topic knowledge, students can actively engage in classroom discussions and meaningful learning.

3.2 Teaching Speech Acts

Since speech acts are primarily defined by the purpose or intentions of the illocutionary act, learning speech acts naturally places language learning in the context of meaningful learning. Meanwhile, students' ability to express specific speech acts, according to Gilmore (2011: 787-788), is one of the most critical components of communicative competence, namely, pragmalinguistic competence. Teaching pragmatics, such as speech acts, is often overlooked in traditional language classrooms. One reason is that it is sometimes assumed that students will acquire a significant amount of pragmatic knowledge without the need for pedagogical intervention, since some pragmatic knowledge is universal, and students can also gain pragmatic aspects through L1 language transfer (Kasper and Rose 2001: 4-6). Another important reason for this neglect may be attributed to the difficulty of teaching: Unlike vocabulary and grammar, which have concrete and clearly defined content and generative rules, teaching pragmalinguistic aspects can be challenging: What are the teachable elements of speech acts?

Our position in this paper is clear: teaching pragmatics in the classroom is necessary and feasible. Students may already possess some pragmatic knowledge, either from their first language or from universal communicative principles, such as the Cooperative Principle laid out by Grice (1975). However, this knowledge and these rules do not automatically transfer to new L2 tasks; L2 learners often overlook contextual information and fail to apply the rules they have learned in their first language (Kasper and Rose 2001: 6). Therefore, teachers have a vital role in raising students' awareness of their passive pragmatic knowledge and rules, encouraging them to apply these actively in L2 contexts. Additionally, research indicates that native speakers and L2 learners may use different speech acts in identical contexts, and even when they employ the same speech act, they may utilize distinct linguistic forms (Bardovi-Harlig 2001). Furthermore, we believe that speech acts can be broken down into two types of routine formulas: syntactic formulas and semantic formulas. Based on our teaching experience, we propose the following recommendations for teaching speech acts through a Consciousness-Raising approach.

The concept of Consciousness-Raising is often used in discussions about the importance of explicit grammar instruction, which encourages efforts to draw students' attention to or identify specific features or regularities in the language data to which learners are exposed (Willis and Willis 1996; Ellis 2002). Some of the main characteristics of Consciousness-Raising activities summarized by Ellis (2002: 168) consist of "isolating a specific linguistic feature," "providing data" with "the target feature," offering "an explicit rule" to describe the feature, and providing "clarifications" in the form of additional data, descriptions, or explanations when misunderstandings occur. Students are sometimes also required to "articulate the rule" describing the grammatical structure. Although Con-

consciousness-Raising activities are primarily designed to develop explicit knowledge of grammar (ideally for adult learners), we believe the principles behind Consciousness-Raising can also be applied to speech act acquisition, albeit with a different focus. Below are a few concrete consciousness-raising activities we recommend:

- 1) Identify the intent of the speech act: Students are exposed to data featuring different speech acts, such as various comments from netizens expressing different opinions on the same topic. Instead of first drawing students' attention to the form or structure of sentences, we can start by drawing their focus to the "intent" of these comments. For instance, the teacher can design speech-act sorting activities, preferably in groups, to ask students to categorize the comments. This exercise can help identify or classify the major categories or subcategories of speech acts. Alternatively, teachers can also ask students to focus on a few specific speech acts subtypes, such as criticizing, apologizing, or hypothesizing.
- 2) Isolate and identify the syntactic formula and the semantic formula for speech acts. One of the major challenges in teaching speech acts in the classroom setting lies in the rich variety of ways to express the same speech acts. Nevertheless, research shows that there are often routine syntactic formulas concerning the "form" aspects of speech acts and semantic formulas concerning the "meaning" or "content" aspects of speech acts, which are frequently used to express the same speech act (Rose and Ng 2001; Bardovi-Harlig 2001). The formulas can transform the variable nature of speech acts into relatively stable and teachable patterns in the classroom without losing their variations – in other words, providing some concrete "handles" for instruction.

The syntactic formulas concentrate on the sentence patterns used to convey specific speech acts and can thus be viewed as a natural extension of traditional grammar drills, but within a particular context. For example, from the online comments that express suggestions or dissuasion in (18), we can guide students to analyze their formal characteristics in conveying these target speech acts: Students observe the use of imperative sentences, specific verbs, the frequent absence of subjects, and the use of particles like *-ba* at the end of sentences. Likewise, comments that express strong assertions provide an excellent opportunity to teach rhetorical questions in Chinese – a sentence type rarely covered in traditional classroom instruction.

The semantic formulas concern "the means by which a particular speech act is accomplished in terms of the primary content of an utterance" (Bardovi-Harlig 2001; cf. Olshtain and Cohen 1983). For example, an apology may contain an illocutionary force or the content components used to express purpose, explanations, acknowledgment of responsibility, an offer of repair, and a promise (Olshtain and Cohen 1983). There are observable variations in the components included and the order in which they appear in the specific realizations of the same speech act, but it would benefit students to be exposed

to these different variations and to summarize the semantic components. Noticing these components can help decode the meaning and strategies used in a speech act, laying the foundation for students to formulate their own versions by arranging the components. For example, how can students create their own assertive statements? By analyzing the online comments listed in (18) for assertive statements, we can identify certain semantic and pragmatic components commonly found in such sentences. These may include stating the main issue, expressing evaluation or judgment, providing supporting evidence, conveying strong personal emotions, and offering reflection or a call to action. Students can be encouraged to refer to these “semantic components” when composing their own “Weibo” posts. In this way, semantic and pragmatic training becomes more concrete and practical, supported by a wealth of vivid, authentic examples from native speakers.

Based on these consciousness-raising activities, which help students acquire both explicit and implicit knowledge of speech acts by drawing their attention to the form and meaning of these acts, students are prepared for more contextualized and communicative practice. For instance, the teacher can either provide context, such as the news or event background, and ask students to express their opinions using specific speech acts, or share comments from online sources or fellow students and ask others to respond, thereby practicing specific speech acts using commonly recognized syntactic and semantic formulas.

4 Other Considerations for Course Design

Due to the nature of a course based on Chinese social media platforms and incorporating authentic language materials from these platforms, extra considerations regarding the accessible and secure use of these platforms, psychological preparedness for online language learning, and the workload of teachers should receive special attention when designing such a course (cf. Lomicka and Lord 2016).

4.1 The Accessibility and Security of Online Platforms

Before asking students to download Chinese social media apps, teachers should first review national or university policies regarding the use of social media in teaching contexts. For example, Leiden University, following the government’s advice and the Dutch Data Protection Authority, explicitly prohibits the installation of certain Chinese social media apps, such as WeChat, on university devices. Additionally, some platforms, including DeepSeek, a Chinese AI chatbot that has recently gained popularity, are also banned on the university’s infrastructure.³ It’s therefore the teachers’ responsibility to check whether

3 The university announcement on the ban of DeepSeek on 11 February 2025: www.staff.universiteitleiden.nl/announcements/2025/02/do-not-use-deepseek-or-other-unsafe-tools?cf=humanities&cd=institute-for-area-studies.

specific tools or platforms are approved by their universities. If students cannot access a particular app due to such restrictions, we suggest that, if necessary, teachers curate relevant materials from that platform in advance and share them with students as reading materials, allowing students to still engage with this social media content.

Access issues may also stem from the platforms themselves. Given China's specific digital environment, students may face unique challenges during the registration process. For instance, signing up for certain apps, often requires a mainland Chinese phone number or requires Chinese phone verification (such as Zhihu and the payment function of Weixin). Some apps, like Douyin and Bilibili, aren't accessible through local app stores. In our recent survey, students reported registration barriers, including unclear instructions, the requirement for a Chinese mobile phone, data safety concerns, and other issues. Among the available apps, Xiaohongshu have emerged as the most popular app by our students due to its presence in local app stores and user-friendly registration processes. To ensure inclusivity, students can be advised to explore alternative social media platforms. In practice, our students are encouraged to search for authentic Chinese-language content using globally accessible platforms such as Google, YouTube, and Twitter/X, among others. Lastly, students should be reminded to safeguard their personal data when using any online platforms.

4.2 Psychological Preparedness for Online Language

While the internet offers a wealth of vivid, engaging, creative, and authentic linguistic material, unfiltered online language is also filled with cyberbullying, profanity, vulgarity, conspiracy theories, and misinformation. Teachers should encourage students to approach this content with the mindset of language learners and observers, analyze and evaluate it critically, and be mindful of context and audience when using such language. Since students are not native speakers and may not intuitively grasp the appropriate usage of some internet expressions, it is also the teachers' responsibility to guide them in using these expressions appropriately and respectfully, thereby avoiding trouble on social media or in real-life situations.

4.3 The Workload of Teachers

In our teaching practice, one of the most persistent and challenging issues we face is the heavy burden of lesson preparation for teachers. This raises a paradox worth exploring: On the one hand, we advocate the use of authentic materials; on the other hand, we must spend a significant amount of time filtering and selecting those materials. Looking ahead, we hope to try new approaches. With the help of emerging AI technologies

and by applying concepts such as the flipped classroom, we aim to delegate more of the filtering and preparation tasks to students. This could stimulate greater learner autonomy and engagement, while also allowing for more flexible use of authentic materials.

5 Conclusion

This paper examines the integration of Chinese social media into a Chinese language course in the higher education setting of the Netherlands. By analyzing the properties of social media language from two different layers – the lexical layer and the speech act/discourse layer – we identify two teaching focuses for a course based on Chinese social media: 1) The three categories of lexical vocabulary within Chinese social media spheres, namely, theme-specific vocabulary, internet neologisms involving linguistic innovations, and internet slang embedded with rich contextual references. 2) The rich diversity of speech acts presented on Chinese social media. We also provide concrete teaching recommendations: For the former, we design various class activities and assignments aligned with the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) framework; For the latter, we highlight the importance of teaching the syntactic and semantic formulas of speech acts and integrating the principles and activities of the consciousness-raising approach. Lastly, teaching such a course incurs costs due to the restrictions and characteristics of Chinese social media platforms; we also share our considerations ranging from security and accessibility to appropriate use and workload issues.

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