



Linguistic Intersections of Language and Gender



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# **“Today I'm gonna show you how to use beep/boop pronouns”**

## **Viral TikToks, neopronouns and folk linguistic pedagogy**

**Sol Tovar, MA**

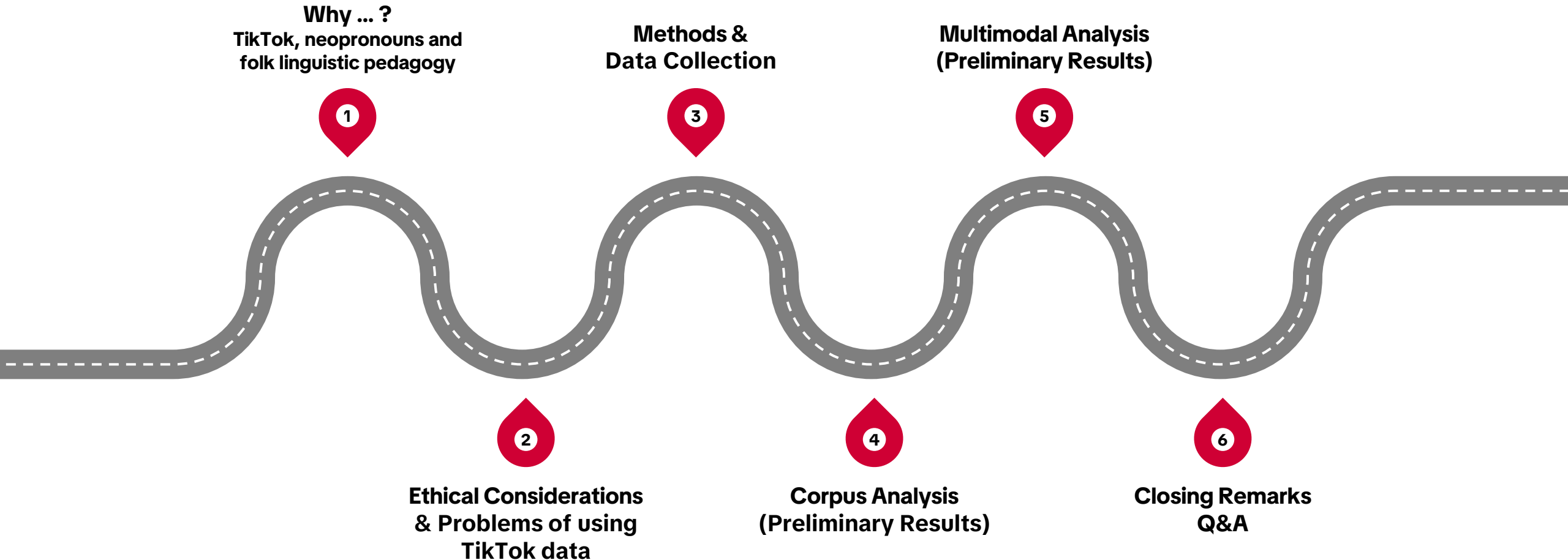
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October 13, 2025

# Roadmap



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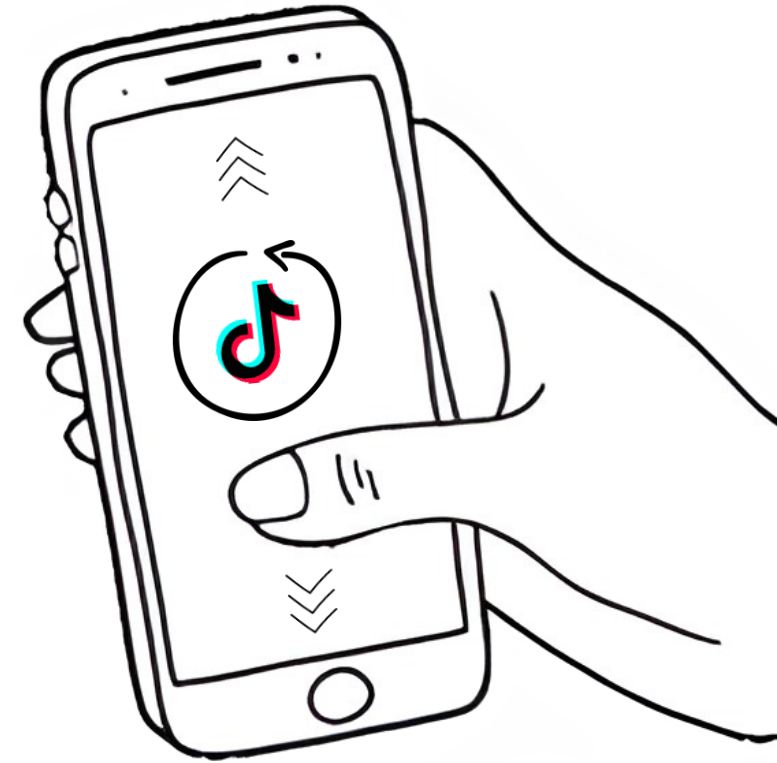


# Why TikTok videos?



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- ➔ "CMC [Computer Mediated Communication] [...] is ubiquitous, and it is changing language" (Lederer 2024: 278).
- ➔ App-mediated communication "interfaces the physical and the virtual; it encompasses a whole range of communicative options ranging from cues-filtered text-based discourses to highly contextualised video" (Yus 2021: 9).
- ➔ TikTok videos are both ephemeral and perpetual at the same time.
- ➔ Researchers need to "sit with the loop" to find emergent themes (c.f. Southerton 2020).



**infinite scrolling**

**infinite loop**

# ♥ Why (neo)pronouns?



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“ [S]ingular *they* and the traditional binaries *he* and *she* tend to be a lot more popular than the neopronouns among trans and nonbinary persons. On the other hand, when it comes to discussions of “What’s your pronoun?” the coined words capture much of the interest, both online and off.

(Baron 2020: 128)

- ➔ “The internet” seen as the source of (neo)pronouns in the Anglophone world as well as the locus of pronoun-sharing practices and pronoun discourse.
- ➔ People wanting to learn how to use neopronouns in English after exposure to these forms, or if the use became more widespread, but considering them “difficult to learn” (cf. Pike-Acosta et al. 2025, Tovar 2024, Hekanaho 2022).

# Why folk linguistic pedagogy?



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## What is folk pedagogy?

“[W]e are steered in the activity of **helping children learn** about the world by a **body of assumptions** that make up what we may call a **“folk pedagogy.”** Folk pedagogy is visible in many contexts: Watch any [caretaker] with a child and you will be struck at how much of what they do is guided by notions of what children’s minds are like and how one may help them learn, even though they may not be able to verbalize their **pedagogical principles**.

(Olson & Bruner 1998: 12; my emphasis)

By extension...

## What is folk linguistic pedagogy?

Intuitive, culturally shaped ideas people have about:

- ➡ how language works,
  - ➡ how it is learned,
  - ➡ and how it should be taught,
- as well as the **practice** of said ideas.

### And why do I care?

Having explored the practices of pre- and in-service EFL teachers (e.g. Tovar 2024), I am curious about the practices of non-teachers in the “teaching” of English neopronouns.

# Ethical Considerations



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**"Hey, ooh, is this illegal?"** (PinkPantheress 2025)

**!** The DFG's (n.d.) "Handreichung: Informationen zu rechtlichen Aspekten bei der Handhabung von Sprachkorpora" has a lot of limitations when it comes to collecting corpus data, is outdated and does not consider the **UrhWissG**\* act.  
<https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v8i1.5526>

**i** **Section 60d** of the **UrhWissG** act covers text and data mining. The reproduction of "the source material [...] in order to create [...] a corpus that can be analysed" is permitted.

**?** **BUT...** There is a grey area when it comes to consent to use publicly available data.

\* Act to Align Copyright Law with the Current Demands of the Knowledge-based Society

# Ethical Considerations



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## About the videos in my corpus

- ➡ Videos are public and some have gone viral, with many having millions of views.
- ➡ The content creator has 241k followers.
- ➡ I have tried to contact the creator multiple times and received no answer.
- ➡ I am assuming they are okay with me using their videos due to their nature.
- ➡ I will, whenever possible, limit the amount of personal data shared about the content creator on my slides (e.g. e-mail address) and delete anything upon request.

## Recommended Reading:

In this case, I am using data from a person who I assume would be okay with any type of research which furthers the understanding of neopronouns, but what if I was looking into discourses against pronouns?

'Dear Mr. Neo-Nazi, can you please give me your informed consent so that I can quote your fascist tweet?' Questions of social media research ethics in online ideology critique by Christian Fuchs (2018).

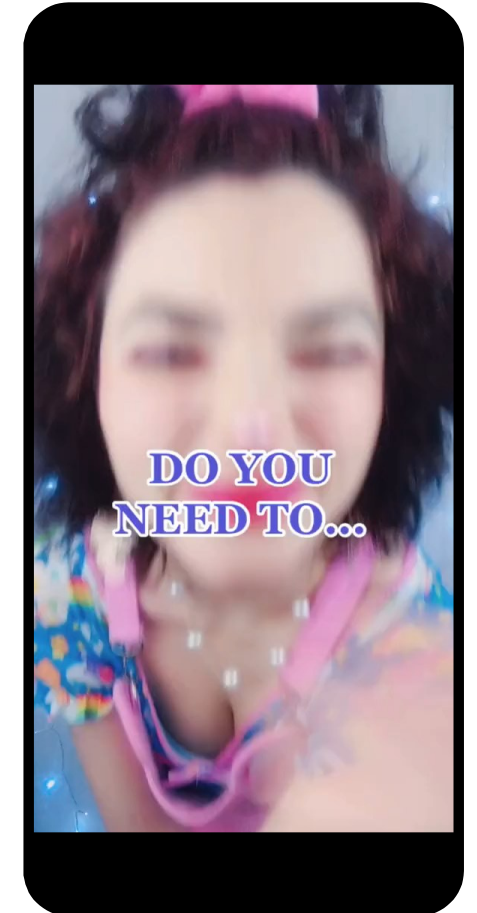
# ♥ Problems of using TikTok data



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## Audio ≠ video content

- ➔ Trends with songs where the message is written on the video or the lyrics of the song are slightly altered to convey a new message.
- ➔ "Algospeak" where the content creator says one thing out loud but superimposes what they really mean on the video, many times using symbols or numbers as substitutes for letters.
- ⚠ No 100% reliable automated way to systematically scrape all these layers of data in bulk.





# **Methods**



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## ➤ **Incorporation of NLP tools** (trying things out!)

- ▶ **Whisper** (transcription), **BERT** (sentiment analysis), **Librosa** (audio processing)

## **Corpus analysis** (using AntConc)

- ▶ **N-Gram** to identify example sentences
- ▶ **KWIC** to identify neopronouns
- ▶ **Collocate** to explore definitions of neopronouns

## **Multimodal Analysis**

# Data Collection



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- ➔ Scraped the links to all the public TikTok videos on the target profile.
- ➔ Ran a series of JavaScript scripts to extract the video titles and URLs and export them as a .csv file.
- ➔ Imported the .csv file into Google Sheets and used the function `=IMPORTXML(URL, xpath_query)` selecting `"//title"` as the XPath query to get the caption or text that appears below the videos on TikTok.
- ➔ Used the scraped title data to look for potentially relevant videos (i.e. I ran a search for the terms **pronoun** or **neopronoun**, or a construction in the format **[neopronoun]/[neopronoun]**) and filter them.
- ➔ Downloaded the potentially relevant videos using JDownloader2.

**i More detailed instructions and code available on  GitHub**



# Corpus Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## N-Grams

- ➔ Experimented with different n-gram windows to identify “lexical bundles” (Biber et al. 1999: 59).
  - i The larger the n-gram window, the higher the chance to find “boilerplate text” and example structures instead of common multiword expressions (for insights on how repetitive text skews n-grams in web corpora see Lin et al. 2010).
- ➔ At n=8, the most typical example sentence, with a frequency and range of 178, was ranked 3.
- ➔ Also note “not a teacher I am just a friend” and “please remember that I’m not a teacher” ranked 5.

AntConc

File Edit Settings Help

Target Corpus

Name: temp

Files: 600

Tokens: 169053

2020-08-14\_@lesbi

2020-08-27\_@lesbi

2020-09-18\_@lesbi

2020-09-22\_@lesbi

2020-09-29\_@lesbi

2020-10-03\_@lesbi

2020-10-04\_@lesbi

2020-10-06\_@lesbi

2020-10-08\_@lesbi

2020-10-09\_@lesbi

2020-10-09\_@lesbi

2020-10-18\_@lesbi

2020-10-18\_@lesbi

2020-11-03\_@lesbi

2020-11-06\_@lesbi

2020-11-13\_@lesbi

2020-11-22\_@lesbi

2020-11-29\_@lesbi

2020-12-03\_@lesbi

2020-12-04\_@lesbi

2020-12-04\_@lesbi

2020-12-11\_@lesbi

2020-12-19\_@lesbi

KWIC Plot File View Cluster N-Gram Collocate Word Keyword Wordcloud ChatAI

N-Gram Types 138679/138679 N-Gram Tokens 164859/164859 Page Size 100 hit 1 to 100 c

	Type	Rank	Freq	Range
1	pronoun journey or whatever journey you re going	1	190	190
2	journey or whatever journey you re going through	2	188	188
3	smile is so contagious in fact i saw	3	178	178
4	your pronoun journey or whatever journey you re	4	171	171
5	being is free until we are all free	5	151	151
6	no being is free until we are all	5	151	151
7	not a teacher i am just a friend	5	151	149
8	please remember that i m not a teacher	5	151	151
9	remember that i m not a teacher i	5	151	151
10	believe that no being is free until we	10	149	149
11	is free until we are all free and	10	149	149
12	that no being is free until we are	10	149	149
13	we believe that no being is free until	10	149	149
14	channel we believe that no being is free	14	148	148
15	free until we are all free and that	14	148	148
16	on this channel we believe that no being	14	148	148
17	this channel we believe that no being is	14	148	148
18	through your pronoun journey or whatever journey you	18	146	146
19	until we are all free and that means	18	146	146
20	all free and that means all over the	20	145	145
21	are all free and that means all over	20	145	145
22	free and that means all over the world	20	145	145
23	we are all free and that means all	20	145	145
24	validate you through your pronoun journey or whatever	24	144	144
25	you through your pronoun journey or whatever journey	24	144	144
26	i m going to show you how to	26	143	141
27	m going to show you how to use	26	143	141

Search Query Words Case Regex N-Gram Size 8 Open Slots 0 Min. Freq 1 Mii

Start Adv Search

Sort by Frequency Invert Order

Progress 100%

Time taken (creating ngram results): 5.8274 sec



# Corpus Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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"You shall know a word by the company it keeps!"  
(Firth 1957: 11)

## KWIC

- ➔ Pronoun identification in left and right context (here: possessive and object form).
  - ❓ Are there any patterns in the formation of neopronouns?
  - ❗ Tendency to use the "base form" for subject and object pronouns; base form + {s} for possessive
- ➔ Timeframe identification from timestamp in files (2020-2023)
  - ❓ What happened in 2024/2025?
  - ❗ Different (sometimes "political") example sentences.

AntConc

File Edit Settings Help

Target Corpus  
Name: temp  
Files: 600  
Tokens: 169053

KWIC Plot File View Cluster N-Gram Collocate Word Keyword Wordcloud ChatAI

Total Hits: 178 Page Size 100 hits 1 to 100 of 178 hits

	File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1	2020-10-14_@lesbi	on. Nyas	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	nyan make
2	2020-10-27_@lesbi	on. Pers	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	per make
3	2020-10-18_@lesbi	erson. Xir	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	xem make
4	2020-09-22_@lesbi	erson. Its	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	it make
5	2020-11-03_@lesbi	on. Buns	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	bun make
6	2020-11-04_@lesbi	on. Dolls	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	doll make
7	2020-10-06_@lesbi	on. Suns	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	sunny make
8	2020-10-08_@lesbi	on. Dew	smile is so contagious. In fact I saw	dew make
9	2020-10-09_@lesbi	n. Wolfs	smile is so contagious in fact i saw	wolf make
10	2020-10-09_@lesbi	on. Nyrs	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	nym make
11	2020-10-18_@lesbi	n. Frogs	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	frog make
12	2020-11-03_@lesbi	son. Rits	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	rit make
13	2020-11-06_@lesbi	i. Woofs	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	woof make
14	2020-11-13_@lesbi	on. Pogs	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	pog make
15	2020-11-22_@lesbi	n. Loves	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	love make
16	2020-11-29_@lesbi	on. Bats	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	bat make
17	2020-12-03_@lesbi	Dreams	smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw	dream make

Query Words Case Regex Results Set All hits Context Size 10 token(s)

so contagious in fact i saw Start Adv Search

Options Sort center to right Sort 1 C Sort 2 1R Sort 3 2R Order by freq

Progress 100%

Time taken (creating KWIC results): 0.1858 sec

# 📍 Corpus Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Example Sentence A (2020-2023):

“ **3SG.N.HUM.NOM** is such a great person. **3SG.N.HUM.POSS** smile is so contagious. In fact, I saw **3SG.N.HUM.OBL** make a whole audience smile. I think **3SG.N.HUM.NOM** should be very proud of **3SG.N.HUM.REFL**.

### >\_ NLP insights:

- ▶ Sentiment analysis using BERT: Positive.
- ▶ Score: 0.9984326958656311

# Corpus Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Collocate

### Looked at:

➡ [neo]pronouns are  
(Window span 5R; min range 5)

➡ are [neo]pronouns  
(Window span 5L; min range 5)

### Interesting result:

❗ Claims of a connection  
between use of neopronouns  
and neurodivergency.

Collocate	Rank	Freq(Scaled)	FreqR	Range	Likelihood	Effect
Search query: neopronouns are						
used	1	640	23	22	150.937	6.093
typically	2	445	20	20	140.132	6.416
<b>neurodivergent</b>	4	440	16	16	105.126	6.110
newer	6	200	8	8	53.955	6.248
well	7	2045	12	12	36.349	3.478
little	8	1475	7	7	18.451	3.172
Search query: pronouns are						
<b>neurodivergent</b>	9	440	15	14	70.588	4.751

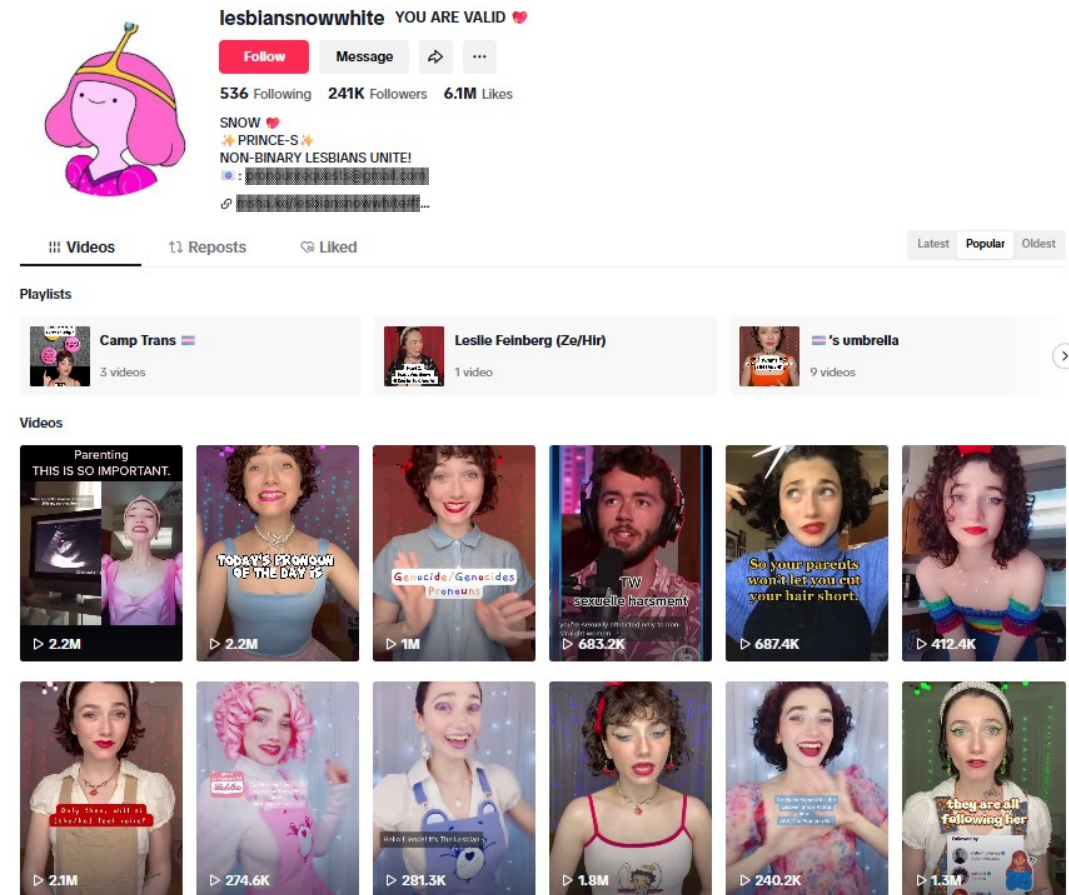


# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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- ➔ TikTok videos as a “mobile linguistic practice” (Heyd 2021: 131):
  - ➔ predominantly oral,
  - ➔ **but** distinct from face-to-face oral
- ➔ **Plan:** multimodal analysis the ten most popular videos in the corpus
  - ❗ Selected by filtering the videos directly on TikTok, looking at the ones that appeared first on the **Popular** tab.
- ➔ **My focus today:** dissecting one of the top-ten videos, which features Example Sentence A from the corpus.



# **Multimodal Analysis** (Preliminary Results)



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**? How do different modes contribute to affect in meaning making and audience engagement?**

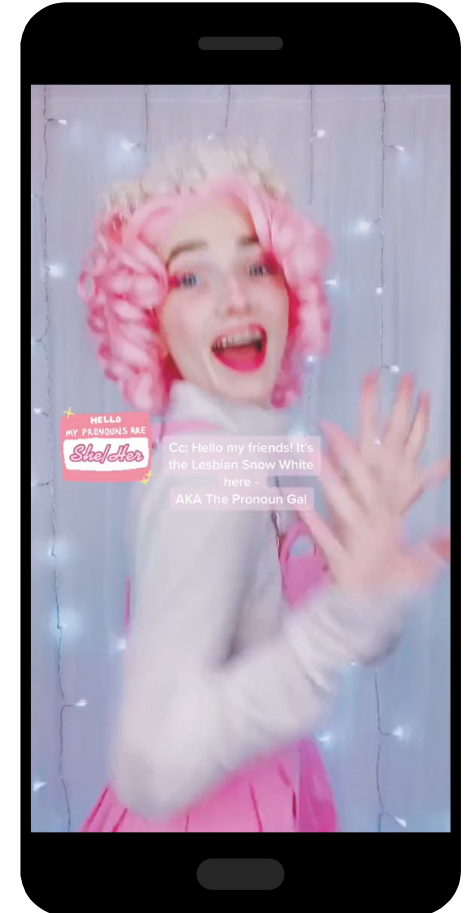
 **Visuals**

 **Audio elements**

 **Camera angles**

 **Gestures**

 **Outfit and make-up choices**



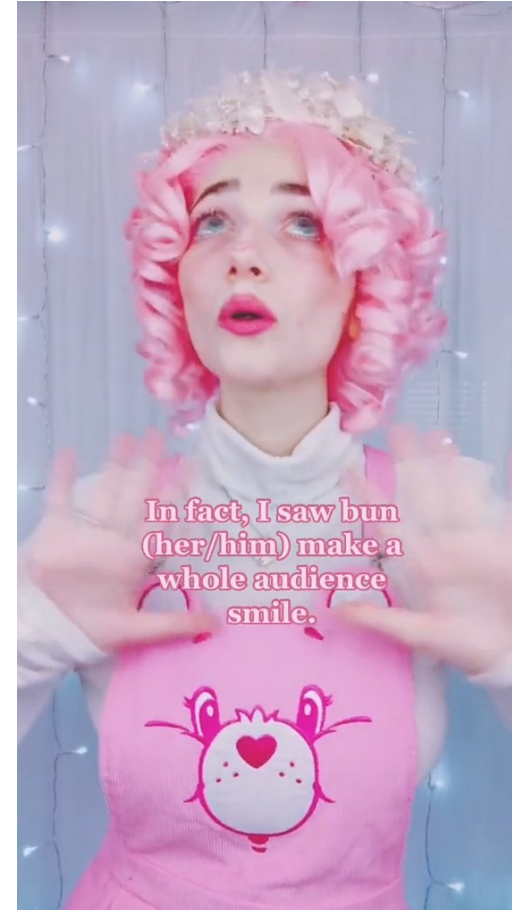




# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Example Sentence 1

### Audio:

🔊 Bun is such a great person.

### On-screen text:

Aa Bun (she/he) is such a great person.



### Visuals

- ▶ **Minimal white background with fairy lights:** clean, soft, magical, dreamy.
- ▶ **Superimposed transcription** (centered vertically and horizontally, slightly below the user's face): accessible.
- ▶ **White and pink color palette:** feminine, girly, sweet, innocent.



# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Example Sentence 2

### Audio:

🔊 Bugs smile is so contagious.

### On-screen text:

Aa Bugs (her/his) smile is so contagious.

### 🔊 Audio elements

- ▶ **No background music or sound effects, just the content creator talking directly to the public:** intimate, authentic.
- ▶ **High pitched voice, fairly natural (or slightly fast) pace:** feminine, youthful, friendly, warm, engaged, energetic.

### 📹 Camera angles

- ▶ **Straight-on, no tilt:** personal, sincere, direct, open.

>\_ **NLP insights (Librosa):**

- ▶ "tempo\_bpm":  
117.45383522727273,
- ▶ "avg\_pitch\_hz":  
591.1986627735959





# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Example Sentence 3

### Audio:

🔊 In fact, I saw bun make a whole audience smile.

### On-screen text:

Aa In fact, I saw bun (her/him) make a whole audience smile.



### Gestures

- ▶ **Constant smiling:** positive, upbeat.
- ▶ **Exaggerated, graceful movements:** playful, enchanting, invoking familiar, comforting archetypes (princess, kindergarten teacher, storyteller)
- ▶ **Hands moving around superimposed text:** enhances engagement by blending verbal and visual channels.



# Multimodal Analysis (Preliminary Results)



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## Example Sentence 4

### Audio:

🔊 I think bug should be very proud of bugself.

### On-screen text:

**Aa** I think bug(she/he) should be very proud of bugself (herself/himself).

### 💋 Outfit and make-up choices

- ▶ **Pink curly wig + White tiara or flower crown:** costumeey, feminine, fantastic, performing a persona.
- ▶ **Pink Care Bear overall dress:** childish, playful, cute.
  - 📌 **Note:** The pink Care Bear is called "Love-a-Lot Bear"

# Closing Remarks



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## Some takeaways regarding folk linguistic pedagogy

### Folk claims about neopronouns and their usage:

- ➡ "Neopronouns are most typically used by neurodivergent individuals who have a hard time relating to gender"

### Positionality:

- ➡ "I am here to teach you" / "today I'm going to be teaching you how to use [x/y] pronouns in sentences" vs. "I'm not a teacher, just a friend".

### Language pedagogy:

- ➡ Behaviourist approach (habit formation, not rule inference)
- ➡ Rote memorization
- ➡ Pattern practice (Audio-Lingual Method)

# Closing Remarks



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## **This is a WIP and there are a lot of limitations!**

### **Corpus data:**

- ➔ I worked with the raw transcriptions and Whisper did of course make errors when transcribing neopronouns. I am manually correcting all transcriptions.
- ➔ I am basing my analysis on only one user, so any results the data yield are limited to this user.

### **Methods:**

- ➔ This is my first time doing multimodal analysis, so I would appreciate pointers, comments and suggestions.



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# Q&A

**Questions? Comments? Suggestions?**

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# Thank you for your time

Feel free to contact me with any questions!

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# Appendix

(Supplementary Material)

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# 📍 Corpus Analysis (Supplement 1a)



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## Example Sentence B (52 hits, 2024-2025):

- 📍 This example sentence is often accompanied by a call to action to donate to families in Gaza.
- “ **3SG.N.HUM.NOM** aspires to live in a world that enriches not only **3SG.N.HUM.POSS** own life, but the lives of all. **3SG.N.HUM.POSS** dream is to live in a world where we can all live in peace, benefiting not only **3SG.N.HUM.REFL**, but everyone around **3SG.N.HUM.OBL**.

### >\_ NLP insights:

- ▶ Sentiment analysis using BERT: Positive.
- ▶ Score: 0.9984326958656311

# Corpus Analysis (Supplement 1b)



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## Example Sentence C (42 hits, 2024-2025):

**i** The US Presidential elections took place in 2024.

**“ 3SG.N.HUM.NOM** is very vocal about not liking a two-party system. Voting in local elections is not only important to **3SG.N.HUM.OBL**, but so many more. Although it might take a while to create the change **3SG.N.HUM.NOM** craves, it is still important to keep **3SG.N.HUM.REFL** informed and dedicated to politics.

### >\_ NLP insights:

- ▶ Sentiment analysis using BERT: **Positive**.
- ▶ Score: 0.9868685007095337

# Corpus Analysis (Supplement 2)



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“ Some neopronouns mimic more conventional pronoun sets (e.g., ey/em/eirs; xe/hir/hirs). Others bear no relationship to established pronoun sets, and are rooted instead in nouns or adjectives related to the bearer's identity (e.g., "star/stars/starsself"; "bun/buns/bunself"; etc).  
(Garrison 2022: xx)

## Neopronouns in Example Sentence A

Most repeated examples:

### NOM/POSS/OBL/REFL

- ➔ frog/frogs/frog/frogself (3x)
- ➔ doll/dolls/doll/dollself (3x)
- ➔ ghost/ghosts/ghost/ghostself (3x)
- ➔ mew/mews/mew/mewself (3x)

- 
- ➔ that/thats/that/thatself (3x)
  - ➔ it/its/it/itself (3x)