# The emerging phenomenon of L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*: characteristics, engagement, and informal language learning

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## Abstract

The rise of digital technology has provided new opportunities for language learning, extending beyond traditional classroom instruction. Video projects have emerged as an effective tool in foreign language education, yet research on self-initiated and regulated video production for language learning is scarce. This study investigates the phenomenon of vlogging in Spanish as a second language on the Chinese video sharing platform *Bilibili*, by analyzing 134 Chinese-produced Spanish-language vlogs. The study aims to understand the vlogs' characteristics, the vloggers' profile, and the ways they utilize the genre for learning Spanish. Through qualitative virtual ethnography, the study uncovers the presence and learning engagement of Spanish L2 vlogs on *Bilibili*. The results reveal a diverse range of vlogs, including daily life experiences and adaptations of popular *YouTube* trends, primarily produced by university students with advanced editing skills. Vloggers incorporate knowledge from both formal education (e.g., the Spanish textbook widely used in China, *Español Moderno*) and informal contexts. In addition to practicing oral Spanish, L2 vloggers use various forms of writing, including Spanish subtitles and Chinese translation, and mobilize multimodal resources, such as *danmu* comments for overlaying corrections. Vloggers also adopt discursive strategies for community interaction, such as self-deprecating metalanguage, feedback solicitation, and metalinguistic reflections. The study highlights the potential of video-sharing platforms like *Bilibili* as tools for language learning, reveals different learning styles in digital environments (self-supervised and interaction-oriented learning), and indicates the direction of integrating daily vlogs and multilingual subtitles into language curricula, emphasizing students' agency, self-directed digital learning, and transmedia literacy development.

## Keywords

# 1. Introduction

Vlogs, also known as video blogs, have become an immensely popular visual genre online. With the rise of platforms like *YouTube* and the widespread availability of filming devices such as smartphones and portable cameras, producing and sharing videos has become easier than ever before. As an interactive and engaging format of content creation, vlogging has gained rapid popularity over the past decade (**Burgess**; **Green**, 2018). Typically, a vlog focuses on an individual's personal life and features the vlogger speaking directly to the camera or capturing daily activities by holding the device in their hand. Vlogs offer celebrities an effective and intimate channel to connect with their audience, while regular users also use vlogs as a platform for self-presentation and identity expression (**Griffith**; **Papacharissi**, 2010; **Vizcaíno-Verdú**; **De-Casas-Moreno**; **Jaramillo-Dent**, 2022).

Furthermore, vlogs are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Youtubers often self-translate their vlogs to reach a global audience (**S. Lee**, 2021). L2 learners also intentionally produce vlogs in their second language (L2) to practice their linguistic skills, engage in intercultural interactions, and construct and negotiate alternative L2 identities (**Amgott**, 2022; **Chang**; **Chang**, 2019; **Codreanu**; **Combe**, 2018; 2019). Despite the growing popularity of vlogs on social media platforms, little is known about out-of-school L2 vlogging practices or vlogs on platforms other than *YouTube*.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining vlogs on *Bilibili*, a prominent Chinese video-sharing platform and community renowned for its anime, comic, and game culture. *Bilibili* is particularly notable for its unique video-superimposed commenting feature, which facilitates the practice of *danmu*. Since 2018, *Bilibili* has organized vlog-focused campaigns to promote vlog culture and reward the best vlogs (**Wang**, 2022). As the vlog genre has gained popularity on Chinese social media, a unique type of production has emerged: L2 vlogging, that is, vlogging using a second language such as English, Spanish, German, or Russian, as the vehicular language. Although *Bilibili* contains some multilingual content, including movies, series, songs, remixes, and fan-made videos, it is still a predominantly Chinese-language platform without an English version, making vlogging in a foreign language an unexpected and intriguing activity within the community.

L2 vlogs, frequently produced by language learners, serve as distinctive examples of language learning in the digital wilds (**Sauro**; **Zourou**, 2019) and embody a digital literacy practice (**Lankshear**; **Knobel**, 2015). These vlogs involve a variety of skills, such as editing, translation, and the utilization of semiotic resources. Thus, the study of L2 vlogs provides a valuable opportunity to investigate instances of out-of-classroom online learning and interaction, as well as study how L2 learners construct and express their identities and (meta)linguistic practices in digitally mediated spaces. With a focus on Spanish, an increasingly popular L2 among Chinese learners, this research aims to describe the emerging phenomenon of L2 vlogging on *Bilibili* and to identify the potential learning opportunities provided by this practice.

# 2. Literature review

## 2.1. Vlogs, identity expression and affective labor

Vlogging has been extensively researched within the fields of communication and media studies. The pioneering work of **Griffith** and **Papacharissi** (2010) uses Goffman's notion of "stage" to theorize vlogs as a means of self-presentation, highlighting its functions as diaries, vehicles for identity expression, and avenues for (quasi-)narcissistic behavior. Subsequent studies have further investigated the potential of vlogs in constructing multifarious transformative identities. For instance, **García-Rapp** (2016) attributed the commercial success of *YouTube* beauty gurus to two video genres:

- tutorials that strengthen the guru's professional profile, and
- vlogs that foster community and establish affective ties.

**Raun** (2015) demonstrated how *YouTube* transgender vloggers use the video-sharing platform to motivate others and assert their 'trans' identity. **Lovelock** (2017) deconstructed the coming-out vlogs of *YouTube* celebrity vloggers, which results in the reinforcement of normative heterosexual identity aligned with the values of neoliberalism.

Another significant area of research investigates vlogging as a form of affective labor, which is commodified and capitalized by interest-driven platforms. For instance, microcelebrities appear to heavily rely on establishing connections with their audience through transparent, open, and authentic communication (**Abidin**, 2015; **Duffy**, 2017). This contrasts with mainstream celebrities, who are expected to maintain a public, professional identity while safeguarding their privacy on social media (**Marwick**, 2013).

Microcelebrities engage in various forms of affective labor, such as accessibility, availability, presence, authenticity, connectedness, and intimacy, effectively commodifying themselves and generating benefits for the platform rather than for themselves (**Raun**, 2018). As a result, individual creators are influenced by platform affordance, which refers to how digital platforms shape and impact user behavior and interactions. Creators also face challenges due to the instability, intensification, and inequality that emerge within the platform-dependent creative economy (**Duffy** *et al.*, 2021). For example, although social media workers play a vital role in maintaining a brand's visibility, their contributions are often overlooked and undervalued (**Duffy**; **Sawey**, 2022). However, while platforms have become central nodes in virtually every cultural industry, their power is based on mutual dependency and the opportunities provided for negotiation, contestation, and even acts of resistance (**Duffy**; **Poell**; **Nieborg**, 2019).

> 'Vlogging in a second language (L2) has gained popularity on *Bilibili*, a leading Chinese video-sharing platform'

While the focus has so far been on *YouTube* and Western social media, there is growing interest to explore vlogging practices on *Bilibili*. In terms of vloggers' identity construction, **X. Wang** and **Picone** (2021) revealed that Chinese *toubu* (top) vloggers develop sophisticated strategies to attract traffic and attention. Their identities counter the standardized and institutionalized *wanghong* industry, which is based on perfect self-presentation and blurred commodification. Instead, Chinese *toubu* vloggers embrace niche original personas and openly enact self-commodification. Wang and Picone shift the focus to regular Chinese school vloggers, who are conscious of their precarious position on *Bilibili* due to the platform's algorithm and unclear rules. Still, young school vloggers

> "have autonomy in accessible content selection, flexible schedule arrangement, and independent interaction with the audiences" (**Wang; Picone**, 2022, p. 14).

Beyond the tensions between platforms and content creators, recent studies have begun to highlight the increasing presence of foreign and transnational vloggers on *Bilibili*. **Xu** and **Zhao** (2021) provide insights into Chinese international students who exercise digital citizenship to cope with the double blind test during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their vlogging reflects a strong sense of civic engagement, connectivity, and empowerment, contributing to the self-resilience of the affected group, as well as their identity and solidarity building during the crisis. On a related note, **Ma** (2022), **Pérez-González** (2022) and **Shi**, **Chang** and **Gao** (2022) illustrate how transnational Western vloggers on *Bilibili* carefully navigate through vernacular scrutinization to maintain their positive images and gain legitimate membership as microcelebrities in the Chinese digitalized third space. Despite the progress of current research on vlogging and *Bilibili*, the emergence of L2 vlogs produced by Chinese speakers remains largely overlooked.

## 2.2. Video projects and language learning

The advantages and effectiveness of using video recording projects in foreign language teaching have been widely recognized. One useful method is the integration of digital storytelling as an instructional tool in EFL classrooms, which blends traditional storytelling with new technologies such as images, videos, and music. Digital stories can include personal or narrative stories, informative or instructional stories, and stories that retell historical events (**Robin**, 2008). Students who participated in a digital storytelling project showed significant improvement in English proficiency, particularly in listening, reading, and writing skills, critical thinking, and learning motivation (**Yang**; **Wu**, 2012). Collaborative video projects also seem to provide an autonomous environment for digital learners to explore, reflect, and engage in peer teaching and teamwork (**Hafner**; **Miller**, 2011). With the increasing use of smartphones, **Gromik** (2012) implemented a cell phone-based video project with EFL Japanese learners. They would produce a 30-second monologue weekly, with had positive effects on vocabulary knowledge and speaking skills, and was received with positive student feedback, indicating a promising future for mobile-assisted language learning.

The rise of *YouTube* culture has sparked interest in the potential of vlogs for L2 learning. **Huang** (2021) used a 3-minute smartphone-based collaborative vlog project with college-level EFL learners in China, improving speaking and digital media production skills. **Amgott** (2021) collected French L2 students' multimodal compositions (vlogs, blogs) from study abroad courses, where they would demonstrate increasing metalinguistic awareness and evolving identities as "multilingual multimodal composers" and self-assumed teachers of imagined audiences.

Regarding learner and teacher perceptions of vlogs, **Hung**'s (2011) study with university ESP students in Taiwan indicated benefits (visual representation, less time constraints, the possibility of self-monitoring, and finding future opportunities) and challenges (technical difficulties, relation to real-time communication) of using vlogs. Similar mixed feedback was reported in **Aldukhayel** (2021b). Moreover, both students and teachers in this study appreciated the wide accessibility, interesting topics, and appropriate length of vlog resources on *YouTube*. In this line, pictorial content, subtitles, and language proficiency play a key role in L2 vlog comprehension (**Aldukhayel**, 2021a).

In practice, the consumption of L2 videos remains a predominant practice in class, while a limited number of teachers assign video production tasks (**Cassany**; **Shafirova**, 2021). In contrast, in out-of-school settings, students and language learners may have ample opportunities and engagement with viewing and producing L2 videos.

## 2.3. Language learning, digital wilds and transmedia literacy

The metaphor *digital wilds* refers to the coexistence of two distinct features in language learning in informal learning and socialization contexts:

- the absence of direct curriculum or teacher intervention, and
- the emergence of learning intertwined with digital literacy and digital technologies (**Reinhardt**, 2022).

A related concept is digital literacy practice or new literacies, which encompasses the essence of vlogging as

> "ways in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include, but are not limited to, technological changes associated with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics" (**Knobel**; **Lankshear**, 2014, p. 97).

Scholars have explored language learning situations in the digital wilds that arise on fandom and fan translation (**Sauro**, 2017; 2019; **Vázquez-Calvo** *et al.*, 2019) and online gaming (**Chik**, 2014). These digital wilds provide ample opportunities for learners to engage in language use, production, and comprehension beyond traditional classroom settings, allowing them to develop their language proficiency in immersive and authentic contexts.

Another crucial concept to comprehend young people's digital practices and skills is *transmedia literacy*, which encompasses competencies related to the production, sharing, and consumption of digital interactive media. These activities span from problem-solving processes in video games to content production and sharing within web platforms and social networks (**Scolari** *et al.*, 2018; **Guerrero-Pico**; **Establés**; **Costa-Sánchez**, 2022). This literacy encompasses not only technical proficiencies, but also critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills that allow users to effectively interact with diverse media content and participate in online communities.

Proactive fans acquire and utilize fan capital –comprising skills, knowledge, social influence, and dedication to professionalism– accumulated through fan play (**Pun**, 2021). As a result, they transition from the amateur domain of participatory cultures to the professional realm of cultural industries, particularly in competitive and professional gaming, digital writing, and social networks (**Establés**; **Guerrero-Pico**; **Contreras-Espinosa**, 2018). However, these new environments are still evolving at the legislative and labor levels, and a lack of understanding about economic and power relations can lead to frustration for fans aspiring to become professionals. A case in point is the *Viki* community, a global network of volunteers who collaborate on crowd-sourced translations of television shows. This platform presents an opportunity to expand and normalize practices that professionalize leisure time on a broader scale. Furthermore, this model is reinforced by community members who utilize their experiences to shape work expectations for a global community (**Henthorn**, 2019).

While video-sharing sites appear to bear great potential for informal language learning, there are relatively few studies investigating this area. Prior studies yield mixed results. For instance, **Benson**'s (2015) research into *YouTube* comments shows they can be a source of interactional meaning and evidence of language and intercultural learning. However, **H. Wang** and **Chen** (2020) claim that social engagement on *YouTube* is limited, because most users participate as 'lurkers', 'likers' or 'sharers': although EFL learners watch English-teaching *YouTube* videos for a variety of learning-related purposes, such as finding resources, increasing attraction, and learning about cultures, few take further actions beyond viewing, liking or sharing the video. *YouTube* content creators are rather exceptional cases. **Zhang** and **Vázquez-Calvo** (2022) have demonstrated how, with the translation, singing and video-editing of Korean and Japanese songs into Catalan and Spanish, some youtubers find in vlogging and video production an actual professional pathway driven by their affinities and likes. Other examples include vlogging practices of a French L2 learner, which increased digital literacy skills and multilingual and intercultural awareness, but also highlighted challenges such as content validation and glocal interpersonal tensions (**Codreanu**; **Combe**, 2018). While not directly related to vlogging, studies with younger participants and teenagers reveal that *YouTube* and video production and sharing practices are oftentimes seen as an extension of leisure activity within specific periods of teenage years, where leaving traces of what one does socially is important for group acceptance (**Vázquez-Calvo**; **Elf**; **Gewerc**, 2020). *TikTok* is gaining attention as a platform for mobile-assisted language learning, offering opportunities for multimodal communication and immediate participation (**Lee**, 2022). Hashtags such as #learnchinese, #learnitalian, and #learnrussian demonstrate the platform's potential as an active medium for sharing content related to linguistic features, cultural practices, and learner experiences. Language learners can engage in informal learning, intercultural identity negotiation, and emotional support through this platform (**Vázquez-Calvo**; **Shafirova**; **Zhang**, 2022).

Despite the dynamic and novel activities of communities and individuals, the literacy practices of digital learners on Chinese video sharing platforms and social media have received little attention. For example, on *Bilibili*, Spanish learners engage in *danmu* viewing and commenting on the acclaimed Spanish TV series *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (**Zhang**; **Cassany**, 2019a). Additionally, advanced learners participate in self-organized fansub groups to translate and subtitle Spanish series and films, utilizing a variety of online Spanish-Chinese resources (**Zhang**; **Cassany**,

> ❝ L2 vlogging enable learners to practice linguistic skills, engage in intercultural interactions, and construct alternative identities ❞

2019b). Moreover, language and culture enthusiasts host video channels on *RED* (similar to *Instagram*) and *Bilibili*, sharing language learning content and claiming a new identity as "language influencers" (**Han**; **Reinhardt**, 2022). While a case study could provide in-depth observations of learners' practices, online content analysis on a larger scale is needed to gain insights into emerging phenomena, such as the unique L2 Spanish vlogging on Chinese video sharing platforms and social media.

> "This qualitative study based on virtual ethnography investigates the characteristics and learning engagement of Spanish L2 vlogs on *Bilibili*"

## 3. Methods

This exploratory study aims to address the research gap in digital literacy practices of Spanish learners on Chinese video sharing platforms and social media by answering the following research questions:

> RQ1. What are the different types of Spanish-language vlogs on *Bilibili*, who produces them, and what are their purposes?

> RQ2. How do *Bilibili* users engage with the vlog genre for Spanish language learning?

The present study employs a qualitative research design based on virtual ethnography (**Hine**, 2015) to investigate Spanish L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*. Virtual ethnography is a research approach that acknowledges cyberspace as a distinct social space and focuses on the social and cultural aspects of online communities. This approach allows for exploration of the ways in which *Bilibili* vloggers influence and are influenced by broader sociocultural forces, such as globalization, interculturality, and language learning trends. Non-participant observation was chosen as the method of data collection because it allows for the analysis of naturally occurring behavior without disrupting the participants or the environment. By collecting and analyzing digital traces and virtual interactions, such as user-generated vlogs and related content, we were able to observe the online behavior of *Bilibili* vloggers and their viewers in a non-intrusive manner and to gain insights into the ways in which language learning and cultural exchange occur in this vernacular out-of-school virtual space.

### 3.1. Context, observation, and data collection

This study centers on *Bilibili*, a leading Chinese video-sharing platform that is particularly favored by Generation Z individuals (born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s). *Bilibili* is known for its creative fan community, which is passionate about anime, comics, and games, and is distinguished by a unique real-time commenting system called *danmu* or *danmaku*, which creates a "bullet curtain" of superimposed comments on the video screen. The video creators on *Bilibili* are known as uploaders, up's, or up-lords [UP主]. As of 2022, *Bilibili* has an average monthly active user base of 332.6 million:
*https://www.statista.com/statistics/1109108/bilibili-average-monthly-active-users*

Over the course of one year, from March 2021 to March 2022, the researcher conducted an ethnographic study of L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*. To collect data, the researcher logged in to the platform at least three times per week to: (1) check platform recommendations for Spanish L2 vlogs, (2) watch recommended videos, and (3) save the videos (57 videos from 34 vloggers) with initial content descriptions. The ethnographer has been a frequent *Bilibili* user for the past decade, with has ample research experience with its functions and community practices. Once the researcher gained a general understanding of Spanish L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*, a sample of vlogs was collected for further analysis.

To sample appropriate videos for this investigation, purposeful sampling was employed, using specific keywords such as 'vlog', 'all Spanish [全西语]', and 'Spa/Spanish [西语/西班牙语]'. Videos that were imported from *YouTube* or produced by native Spanish speakers and those that showcased only minimal Spanish competence were excluded. Additionally, only one video per vlogger was included to avoid an unequal representation of cases (**Snelson**, 2015). The sampling resulted in 134 vlogs from 134 vloggers, which constituted the dataset for analysis.

### 3.2. Data analysis

Content analysis was adopted to examine the presence and characteristics of L2 Spanish vlogging on *Bilibili*. To conduct this analysis, the field researcher watched each vlog at least twice and took note of several important pieces of information. This included identifying the specific theme and genre of the vlog, as well as noting information such as editing and shooting techniques, the decision to vlog in Spanish, and numerical data such as length, number of likes, comments, and *danmu* (i.e., user-generated comments that scroll across the video screen). Additionally, the date of publication was recorded, allowing for analysis of trends over time. To further contextualize the vlogs, the researcher reviewed the uploader's homepage to gather information about their profession and location, if available. This helped to provide insight into the background and interests of the vloggers and their motivations for creating content in Spanish.

To protect the privacy of the vloggers, any identifiable information was removed from the figures of the vlogs before they were analyzed. This was done in accordance with the ethical standards of the *International Association of Internet Researchers* (**Markham**; **Buchanan**, 2012).

To investigate how learners make use of the vlog genre for L2 Spanish learning on *Bilibili*, qualitative discourse analysis was conducted. Through a third viewing session, the field researcher marked learning-related genres, instances or dis-

courses in the vlog such as accessible daily vlogs and 'silent' study vlogs, transcribed the textual or verbal introduction and justification of vlogging in L2 Spanish. The transcription provided insights into vloggers' discursive engagement with the *Bilibili* community to maximize the learning purpose. It also highlighted lexical and morphosyntactic errors in Spanish, which were not replicated in the English translation provided.

> Spanish vlogs on *Bilibili* are multifarious and mainly created by university students in China and Spain, with increasing popularity

In this study, 134 vlogs were carefully examined, resulting in a collection of notes and observations in *Word* and *Excel* documents, comprising 1,258 Chinese characters. The co-authors then engaged in a thorough discussion to identify the most innovative and compelling findings. Several adjustments were made during this process.

Initially, genre categories encompassed themes such as daily routines, food, and travel. However, they were later reorganized based on the characteristics of vlog genres, specifically the "with me" categories. Information that was pertinent to learning and provided insights into students' digital literacy competence was also incorporated. For example, data on post-editing was included, as numerous videos featured Chinese translations or Spanish transcriptions, as well as multimodal resources like emojis, memes, music, and other annotations (credits, titles). These elements indicate the sophistication of the videos.

Key moments within the vlogs were scrutinized multiple times and analyzed to ensure a consensus on interpreting the vloggers' learning activities. In doing so, we honed in on the example of *VideoEle*, a significant case that illustrates the relationship between the resources utilized by vloggers and the content of the initial lessons found in official textbooks.

Ultimately, a comprehensive category of analysis emerged, encompassing: 1) audio elements (target audience, presentation, communicative context, presupposed knowledge, explicit references such as deictics, mentions, and place names, and post-editing); 2) visual components (function –whether accompanying or natural setting or intentional action– and gestures); and 3) other inserted written text or resources. Upon reaching a consensus, the study findings were derived, elucidating the nature and scope of Spanish L2 vlogs on *Bilibili* and the ways learners employ the vlog genre for L2 Spanish learning on the platform.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. L2 vlog production and user profile

The production of Spanish-language vlogs on *Bilibili* is diverse, as shown in Table 1. The most common type of video was the 'with me' subgenre, where the vlogger invites the audience to 'participate' their personal life. Vloggers engaged in various activities while speaking Spanish, such as 'a day with me (58)', 'chat with me (20)', 'travel with me (23)', 'cook with me (13)', 'walk with me (2)', 'plan with me (1)', 'study with me (1)', and 'get ready with me (1)'. Vloggers primarily used two types of shooting techniques: (1) showing-around, where the creator held the camera and explained the surroundings or activities to viewers, such as in 'a day with me'; and (2) monologue, where the vlogger sat in front of the camera and discussed a specific topic, such as in 'chat with me'. Additionally, some vloggers adapted popular *YouTube* trends, such as 'challenge' (2) and 'haul' (1), while others explored less conventional genres like 'role play' and 'short film', which featured scripted storytelling with artistic dubbing and editing. These findings suggest that *Bilibili* and its users have embraced a broad definition of 'vlog', covering a diverse range of topics and subgenres where the vlogger often assumes the dual role of videographer and narrator.

Table 1. Vlog genres

| Genres | | No. of vlogs |
|---|---|---|
| 'With me' | A day with me | 58 |
| | Travel with me | 23 |
| | Update/chat with me | 20 |
| | Food/cook with me | 13 |
| | Study with me | 3 |
| | Walk with me | 2 |
| | Plan with me | 1 |
| | Get ready with me | 1 |
| Others | Couple/family | 3 |
| | Challenge | 2 |
| | Self-introduction | 2 |
| | Reading | 2 |
| | Short film | 2 |
| | Haul | 1 |
| | Role play | 1 |
| | Total | 134 |

The vlogs, despite being amateur-produced, displayed remarkable sophistication in terms of editing (Table 2). Subtitles were a common feature in most videos, serving as a dual-purpose tool for learning: (1) incorporating written Spanish transcription into oral practice, and (2) using Chinese or English as a support and translation tool for L2 Spanish learning. This blend of advanced multimodal resources with traditional academic practices highlights the ingenuity of the vloggers. As the comments suggested, the deliberate use of subtitles also catered to a specific audience, including regular users and Spanish learners, and was valued by the audience as a learning aid.

Table 2. Post-production

| | Degree of post-production | No. of vlogs | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subtitles | Chinese translation | 90 | 67 |
| | Spanish transcription | 98 | 73 |
| | English translation | 2 | 1 |
| Inserted multimedia | Emojis, memes, clips/graphics | 67 | 50 |
| | Credits, intros, outros | 88 | 66 |
| | Background music | 122 | 91 |

The incorporation of multimedia elements was also prevalent in the vlogs, as evident from the use of background music, emojis, and graphics (Figure 1), as well as film clips, scrolling lyrics, and images of famous Spanish quotes. While credits were not commonly seen, many vloggers included video intros and outros to introduce the title or content, thank viewers for watching, and ask for likes, comments, and shares. Some videos also featured outtakes or bloopers, showcasing instances where vloggers stumbled or made comical errors while speaking Spanish.



Figure 1. Inserted emojis and graphics

Regarding the creators, as presented in Table 3, the typical vlogger's profile is a university student located in China or a Spanish-speaking country, mostly Spain. This aligns with the platform's targeted user group. Based on the content of the vlogs, many creators were undergraduate students majoring in Spanish, as Spanish Philology is offered in over one hundred universities in China. Others were exchange students or pursuing a master's or doctoral degree abroad, and some were professionals working in sectors where proficiency in Spanish is required, such as education, interpreting, or tourism. From viewers' comments, it became evident that three overseas vloggers were second-generation Spanish nationals of Chinese descent.

Table 3. Vloggers' profile

| Location | Employment | Affiliation | No. of vloggers |
|---|---|---|---|
| **China** | Student | University | 69 |
| | | High school | 2 |
| | Teacher | University / language school | 3 |
| | Other professions | | 2 |
| | Unemployed | | 1 |
| **Overseas** | Student | University | 25 |
| | Teacher | University / Confucius Institute / others | 4 |
| | Other professions | | 2 |
| Unclear/Undisclosed | | | 26 |
| Total | | | 134 |

In general, there were three main reasons why L2 vlogging on *Bilibili* occurred (as shown in Table 4): (1) personal interest in practicing Spanish and sharing their lives; (2) creating content for a course assignment (which was then later uploaded to *Bilibili* by the vlogger); and (3) participating in a special activity such as The *First Spanish Vlog Contest*, organized by *Eshelper*, a widely-used Chinese-Spanish online dictionary service. In addition to the types of vlogs mentioned above, there was one vlog produced in collaboration with a local press (bearing the editorial's watermark).

Table 4. Vlog types

| Types | No. of vlogs |
|---|---|
| Practice and share | 96 |
| Course assignment | 35 |
| Submission to contest | 2 |
| Professional | 1 |
| Total | 134 |

Taking a holistic perspective, the number of L2 Spanish vlogs on *Bilibili* has significantly increased from a total of 20 in 2018-2019 to 94 in 2020-2021, likely incentivized by pandemic restrictions, and the trend appears to continue in 2022 with 20 vlogs already uploaded at the time of this research. This demonstrates the growing interest in this genre and the popularization of vlogging culture on *Bilibili*. In the next chapter, we will explore selected vlog subgenres and their potential benefits for learning Spanish as an L2.

## 4.2. 'A day with me'

Daily vlogs emerged as the most popular genre of Spanish-language vlogs on *Bilibili* due to their linguistic accessibility, opportunities for self-presentation, and genre versatility. They are particularly preferred by learners of Spanish as L2 as they pose relatively low linguistic barriers. Many vloggers described their videos as their *primera experiencia* [first experience], 初尝试 [first try] or 初投稿 [first submission] in Spanish L2 vlogging. The language used in daily vlogs is usually simple, consisting of basic lexicon and syntactic constructions with fundamental grammar. Vloggers commonly use first person singular or plural conjugation or unconjugated verbs in the present or near future tense to describe their daily routines. Describing daily life is a topic covered in the third lesson of *Español Moderno*, the most widely used Spanish textbook in China for university students. This lesson includes reflexive verbs (*cepillarse*, 'to brush one's teeth'), time adverbs (*por la mañana*, 'in the morning'), and the conjugation of the irregular verb *ir*. These linguistic features enable basic communication about daily routines.

Daily vlogs are centered around real-life events, ranging from a vlogger's routine activities to notable moments that occur over a short period of time. For university students (the most common profile), a typical daily vlog might involve getting up in the dormitories (as most Chinese university students live on campus), walking to the canteen, attending classes, and studying in the library. As a result, creating daily vlogs in Spanish creates both a sense of familiarity and novelty: campus activities are relatable to viewers with a similar background on *Bilibili*, while the use of Spanish is original and intriguing for a general audience.

As university-level Spanish learners, vloggers drew inspiration from their class materials and textbooks. V133 creatively imitated the format of *VideoEle*, a popular series of videos for teaching Spanish as a foreign language. Although the production quality of *VideoEle* was lacking (with camera shakes and unstable scene transitions), the videos were available online and used by some Spanish teachers in China. Figure 2a/b shows the similar typography, style, and layout between the title of the vlog ([A day in...]) and *VideoEle* ([This is Barcelona]). The background music used was also taken from *VideoEle*. The vlogge's speech was interactive and conversational (*¿Cómo lo pasaré?* [How will I spend it (today)?]),



a. Daily vlog inspired in *VideoEle*

b. A video of *VideoEle*

c. Citation in the vlog

d. Cited fragment from *Español Moderno* (Vol. 1, p. 51)

Figure 2. Daily vlogs

similar to the register used in *VideoEle*. After an eventful day, the vlogger concluded by quoting a sentence from *Español Moderno* (Figure 2b/c): *¿Estamos contentos con nuestra vida estudiantil? Aunque terminamos la jornada muy cansados, yo digo que sí.* [Are we happy with our student life? Although we finished the day very tired, I say yes.]

Finally, daily vlogs offer a flexible and versatile genre. Depending on the context, such as confinement, festivals, or holidays, daily vlogs can be transformed into various sub-genres, including 'quarantine with me', 'travel with me', or 'cook with me', which require more developed or specialized vocabulary, oral skills, and intercultural awareness. For example, 'quarantine with me' vlogs document daily activities at home during lockdown, detailing coping strategies for confined living, and encourage viewers to stay safe and optimistic. University vloggers have explained in Spanish the extra procedures to enter the campus during the pandemic (such as taking temperature, disinfection, wearing face masks), or showcased a "new normal" landscape (such as Covid-related posters on the campus or making an appointment to enter the library).

The 'travel with me' vlogs recorded the vlogger's experience as a tourist, both within China and in Spanish-speaking countries in South America. The 'food/cook with me' vlogs demonstrated how to cook dishes from China or Spanish-speaking countries, or showed dinners

> The most popular genres of Spanish vlogs on *Bilibili* are "a day with me," "chat with me," and "travel with me."

out, providing opportunities for intercultural comparisons. For example, when introducing *callos* (a traditional Spanish stew made with beef tripe), the vlogger referred to *lu zhu* (a traditional Beijing stew made with pork entrails). These intercultural references allow vloggers to act as intercultural brokers, helping the audience to understand the differences and similarities between Spanish and Chinese sociocultural realities (V70).

## 4.3. 'Chat with me'

'Update/chat with me' vlogs are characterized by interactivity, as vloggers shared recent events or discussed a certain topic with the audience. Compared to other genres, 'chat with me' vlogs are more spontaneous, often involve uninterrupted speaking, and require a certain level of language proficiency. Vloggers in this category adopted two roles:
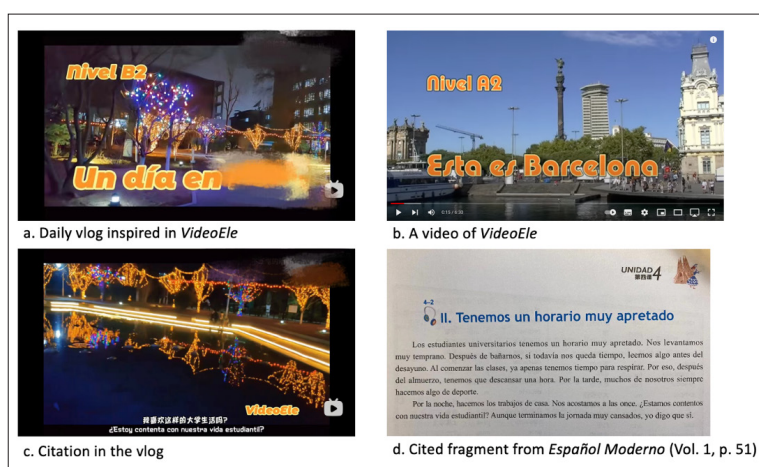
- a struggling yet persevering learner who celebrated Spanish learning feats and created an affective link with viewers by sharing emotional moments, such as the eventual pronunciation of the rolled /r/ after two years of practice (V92; Figure 3a), and by sharing anxious moments and mental breakdowns (V110, 128).
- an expert or teacher, who shared and reflected upon their language learning experiences, such as motives to learn Spanish and recounted on study abroad periods (V27, 35; Figure 3b), recommended tools and resources (series, books) for improving Spanish (V36, 110), or work prospects analyses for Spanish graduates (V61).



'Tras mucha práctica, puedo pronunciar /r/ bien.'

[After a lot of practice, I can pronounce /r/ well.]

'Seguro que hay algunos estudiantes de la filología hispánica. Están viendo este vídeo para saber algún truco. Bueno, pero de verdad me parece que no hay ningún truco en cuanto a un idioma, porque el idioma es algo que tienes que practicar cada día.'

[I'm sure there are some students of Hispanic Philology who are watching this video to learn some trick; well, but it really seems to me that there is no trick when it comes to a language, because language is something you have to practice every day.]

Figure 3. Chat vlogs

### 4.4. 'Study with me', 'reading' & 'challenge'

Learning-themed genres like 'study with me' and genres to practice and showcase spoken Spanish, such as 'reading' and 'challenge', were also present but to a lesser extent. Unlike daily vlogs or other 'with me' genres, learning-themed genres are less interactive and mainly serve the purpose of self-motivation and self-supervision. In 'study with me (*estudia conmigo*)' vlogs, the learner sits for hours studying Spanish (which is sped up in editing), doing exercises in the textbook *Español Moderno*, taking notes, consulting the Chinese-Spanish dictionary *Eshelper*, or practicing spoken Spanish (including moments of stammering and repetition). Stimulating background music is usually added to the recording. Although there is no interaction with the audience, vloggers can add explanations in the video description. In Figure 4, the vlogger first states the type of vlog (in English), then accentuates the urgency of the task (in Spanish) and provides background information (in Chinese).

Reading aloud is a highly effective and suggestopedic method[2] for practicing a second language. Vlog creators shared poems read in different languages, including Spanish (by poets such as Pablo Neruda), with synchronous bilingual subtitles set against an edited background. Reading aloud poetry is considered a form of 'close reading' where readers construct interlinguistic and intercultural meaning through careful consideration (**Hanauer**, 2001). In the 'reading' genre of vlogs, the vlogger's presence was central, and the setting was more curated, with elements such as candles, wool clothing, and ambient music (Figure 5a), creating a space that served both for learning and performance.

The 'challenge' genre provided a fun way to practice Spanish. A popular challenge on *Bilibili* involves creators imitating Chinese and L2 flight announcements, which can be a difficult task due to the speed and pronunciation required. V94 (Figure 5b) is one of two Spanish versions of this type of challenge found in the dataset. However, a recent search for "Spanish flight announcement challenge" revealed over 30 similar challenges available on *Bilibili*. In her video, the creator juxtaposed her image with an edited slide displaying the announcements in Spanish and Chinese. She delivered the speech while reproducing the tone, prosody, and intonation of a flight attendant. By doing so, the learner showcased her language competence and affirmed her identity as a successful learner.
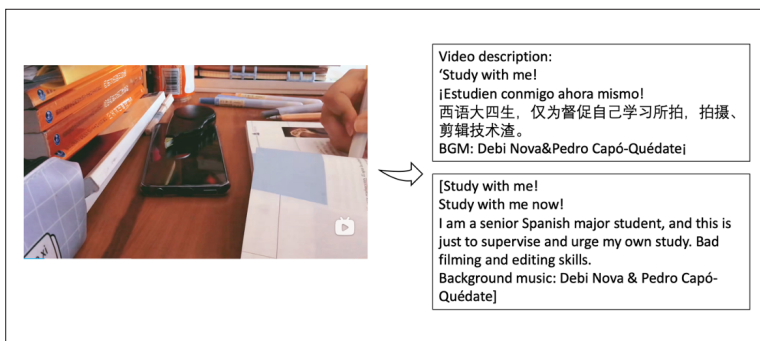


Video description:
'Study with me!
¡Estudien conmigo ahora mismo!
西语大四生，仅为督促自己学习所拍，拍摄、剪辑技术渣。
BGM: Debi Nova&Pedro Capó-Quédate¡

[Study with me!
Study with me now!
I am a senior Spanish major student, and this is just to supervise and urge my own study. Bad filming and editing skills.
Background music: Debi Nova & Pedro Capó-Quédate]

Figure 4. 'Study with me'



[I like you when you're silent because you are like absent.]

a. Reading

[Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Beijing Daxing International Airport.
The outside temperature is 27 degrees Celsius or 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
Please keep your seat belts fastened until the "fasten seat belt" sign is off.
Take care when opening the compartments.
Thank you!]

b. Challenge

Figure 5. 'Reading' and 'challenge'

## 4.5. Discursive strategies for L2 learning

The analysis revealed various discursive strategies employed by vloggers for L2 learning, including self-deprecating metalanguage, feedback solicitation, and self-improvement and self-correction discourses. Metalinguistic discourses, which involve social media users' self-reflection and comments on their own language use, can be essential to online participation (**Lee**, 2013). Initially, vlogging in Spanish was perceived as a challenging task:

> "*Era mucho más difícil que lo que pensaba. No podía dejar de reírme al hablar y, mientras tanto, los peatones <u>me miraron</u> con extrañeza. Me parece muy embarazoso hablarme ante la cámara, sobre todo hablando español*."
> [it was much more difficult than I thought. I couldn't stop laughing when I spoke and meanwhile, the pedestrians looked at me strangely. I find it very embarrassing to speak to myself on camera, especially speaking Spanish.] (V103)

In addition, a common discursive strategy observed among vloggers was self-deprecation when it comes to their Spanish proficiency. Many expressed insecurity and expected to make mistakes, often apologizing in advance, or making light of their language skills. Some even explicitly asked their audience for tolerance and forgiveness for any mispronunciations, grammar errors, or limited vocabulary, emphasizing that they were still beginners or 'newbies' in learning Spanish (V71). However, some vloggers also solicited feedback from viewers who are more proficient in Spanish, inviting them to engage in discussions or provide corrective feedback, with the goal of improving their Spanish skills together (V101):

> "*Estoy segura de que habrá muchos errores <u>cuando hablo español</u>, porque no soy una hispanohablante. Entonces, si también sabes hablar español y si encuentras <u>alguno errores</u>, puedes decírmelo y puedes enviarme mensajes y darme consejos. Y en el futuro voy a hacerlo mejor poco a poco*."
> [I am sure there will be many mistakes when I speak Spanish, because I am not a native Spanish speaker. So, if you also know how to speak Spanish and you find any mistakes, you can tell me and you can send me messages and give me advice. In the future I will do better little by little.] (V29)

During quarantine, vloggers frequently made learning-related resolutions. With many students in China and overseas forced to stay confined, opportunities for communication with classmates or locals became scarce. Fearing a decline in their oral language skills, vloggers turned to L2 vlogging in Spanish as a valid way to maintain and eventually improve their proficiency:

> "*Si <u>no hablar y practicar</u> español durante muchos meses, olvidaré <u>muchos palabras</u> y mi español <u>aprendo</u> empeorará, y creo que hablar español enfrente de una cámara es una buena forma para practicar mi español*."
> [If I don't speak and practice Spanish for many months, I will forget many words and my Spanish will get worse, and I think that speaking Spanish in front of a camera is a good way to practice my Spanish.] (V33)

In V36, the vlogger was studying abroad in Mexico and was concerned about the health risks of face-to-face oral interactions with neighbors. By suggesting "practice with me", he took control and demonstrated the agency and self-efficacy of an L2 digital learner.

> La mejor manera para que no se me olvide el español es practicar conmigo, con mí mismo.
> [The best way for me to not forget Spanish is to practice with me, with myself.] (V36)

After the video is published, creators have two options to make changes: (1) traditional forum comments, and (2) *danmu* comments. Forum comments are typically found in the comment section, where creators can post self-corrections after publishing the video. The comment can be pinned to the top, making it noticeable for future viewers. For instance, in V111, a food vlog where the vlogger tried street food in Beijing, including *tanghulu*, a northern Chinese snack of candied hawthorn berries, the vlog has subtitles in both Chinese and Spanish. However, the vlogger erroneously translated *espino cocido* [cooked hawthorn berries] into 生山楂 [raw hawthorn berries] in Chinese, and left a comment with the realization of her mistake (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Self-correction through pinned forum comments

In *danmu* comments, which are superimposed moving texts, creators can mark their comment as uploaded, indicated by a blue symbol before the text, to reveal authorship and gain visibility. *Danmu* comments can be used to repair any potential content or linguistic inaccuracies in the video. Figure 7 shows an example where the vlogger used *danmu* to self-repair
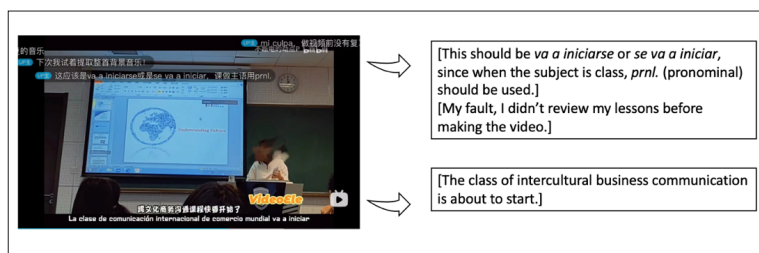


Figure 7. Self-correction through *danmu*

and apologize for a mistake in the original monologue. However, the uploader did not realize that *va a iniciar* is also acceptable in this syntactic construction if the teacher is considered the subject, even though it may not be the most common choice. Despite this, the self-repair *danmu* comment demonstrates learners' metalinguistic awareness through L2 vlogging. However, it's essential to maintain a critical view regarding the quality of such reflections in vernacular productions.

> L2 vloggers mobilize discursive and multimodal resources for language learning. *Danmu* comments are overlaid on the video to provide corrections

## 5. Discussion

Regarding the types of vlogs, vloggers, and their purposes (RQ1), the analysis revealed a variety of 'with me' genres and adaptations of popular *YouTube* trends. These were primarily created by university students with sophisticated editing skills, demonstrating their competence and aspiration to use Spanish in diverse communicative situations, with different linguistic registers and interactive styles. However, as shown in the examples, vloggers are still in the process of learning and make mistakes in various linguistic domains. The assimilation of *YouTube* vlog genres and trends (intros and outros) suggests that for some users, L2 vlogging is an opportunity to attract attention and create an online persona, such as a language influencer. The motivations for L2 vlogging range from personal and entertainment purposes (recording life, learning L2, participating in vlog campaigns) to formal and even commercial contexts (sharing course assignments, collaborating with the press). While there may be other unidentified reasons, these findings offer insights into the intersection of L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*, where the boundaries between formal and informal learning are blurred, and various contexts (entertainment, learning, working) become interconnected or 'collapsed' on a social media platform (**Marwick**; **Boyd**, 2011).

Regarding how users appropriate the vlog genre (RQ2), the analysis identified both content and discursive strategies employed by L2 learners for language learning. In terms of vlog content, learners draw on L2 knowledge and skills gained from both formal and informal contexts. Formal education influences daily and study vlogs, where vloggers discuss topics associated with campus life, record themselves while doing assignments, employ the linguistic repertoire acquired during the first few months of learning, and even the aesthetic and discourse style of teaching materials. Genres such as poems and flight announcements are also closely related to L2 teaching. On the other hand, travel or cooking vlogs are based on the vloggers' personal experiences and pastimes. As *Bilibili* uploaders, vloggers are skilled at leveraging platform affordances such as *danmu* for self-correction and selecting background music for their vlogs.

In terms of discursive strategies, we observed an open space for community-based peer learning, supported by self-deprecating metalanguage, self-improvement discourse, solicitation of feedback, and critical metalinguistic reflection. Vloggers also use writing to facilitate learning more challenging spoken skills. With Spanish subtitles, Chinese translation, and other forms of writing (forum and *danmu* comments), vloggers' learning practices share both traditional (academic) and leisure-like (multimodal) features.

This study specifically focused on informal learning strategies that were identified by **Scolari** *et al.* (2018). These strategies include learning by doing, which involves the learner engaging in a series of activities (vlogging, interaction with other viewers) that are related to the skill they wish to acquire or improve (oral or written Spanish). Another strategy is imitating or simulating, which requires the learner to self-manage their multimodal resources and time, as well as their own emotions and identity (as a newbie learner). Lastly, the evaluating strategy involves the learner analyzing their own work or the work of others in order to acquire or perfect a skill (asking for feedback).

The vlogs examined in this study demonstrate the complexity of learning styles in digital environments, including interaction-oriented (feedback-seeking) and self-monitored learning. Daily vlogs showcase vloggers sharing their experiences as Spanish learners, connecting with peers, introducing parts of Spanish culture, and expanding their vocabulary and spoken skills. Chat vlogs allow vloggers to leverage intersubjectivity to perform various L2 roles, such as a struggling yet persevering learner or an expert and successful learner teaching an imagined novice audience. While community interaction is a common pursuit, not all vloggers are interested in it. Some 'silent' learners record their practices (e.g., reading, studying) and upload the videos to *Bilibili*, using them as a form of self-supervised learning in the digital age. Although study vloggers may seem disinterested or undisturbed, there is a large audience seeking an effective learning ambiance at a low cost by watching 'study with me' videos (**Lee** *et al.*, 2021).

## 6. Conclusions

L2 vlogging can be viewed as a digital literacy practice that involves multiple levels of sophistication. Firstly, L2 vloggers engage in self-translating discourses of various genres and culture-specific terms. Secondly, they add subtitles and use visual texts such as emojis, memes, sound effects, and music. Thirdly, they integrate different multimodal resources into the final audiovisual performance, including the reappropriation of teaching materials such as *VideoEle*. Lastly, they appropriate the platform affordances, such as *danmu* and forum comments, to post-edit the video and interact with the viewers. Learner-vloggers exhibit a combination of agency, autonomy, and self-efficacy, which can lead to cumulative cycles of learning and achievement and create a meaningful learning experience in an immersive environment (**Sán-**

chez-López; **Roig-Vila**; **Pérez-Rodríguez**, 2022). Similar to literacy practices in the digital wilds (fanfic, fansub, and fandub) and short video platforms, vlog making enables language learners to perform various L2 identities and create L2 communities of practices around vlogging.

> Learners draw on knowledge and skills acquired from both formal and informal contexts in their vlogs

For formal education, L2 vlogging on *Bilibili* can provide an authentic and engaging context for language learning, develop digital literacy skills, offer authentic assessment opportunities, expose students to diverse language use, and promote cultural competence. In particular, integration of daily vlogs, multilingual subtitles, and discursive competence into language curricula and fostering students' agency and self-directed learning styles are some of the directions that this study indicates. Emerging platforms such as *TikTok* facilitate literacy practices like *BookTok*, a subculture within *TikTok* dedicated to reading and discussing young adult literature (**Jerasa**; **Boffone**, 2021). By recognizing and appreciating these *TikTok*-mediated literacy practices, educators can bridge the gap between formal and informal reading practices, ultimately promoting increased agency, community, and transformative experiences for students (**Espejel**; **Concheiro**; **Pujolà**, 2022).

This study sheds light on the intricacies of teaching 'minority languages' in China. Although Spanish L2 teaching has experienced exponential growth in the country in the last decade (**Yu**, 2021), previous research has tended to depict Chinese Spanish learners as uncreative, obedient, and dependent (**Castaño Arques**, 2019, pp. 50-51), and Spanish teaching methods in China are mostly traditional, focusing on textbooks and written language with limited teacher-student interactions that follow the initiate-response-evaluate model (**Li**, 2018). However, the L2 vloggers on *Bilibili* showed a great interest in practicing their spoken skills, while writing seemed to take a back seat, with about a third of the vlogs lacking Spanish transcriptions. Educators could consider incorporating L2 vlogging into their teaching to inspire innovation, drawing on experiences from established practices like fanfiction (**Sauro**; **Sundmark**, 2018). "A day with me" vlogs could be a starting point for beginners to practice underrepresented oral dialogue, while "chat with me" vlogs could help advanced learners improve their written interactive chatting skills.

This study has limitations due to its exploratory nature. The data analyzed was primarily collected online, and individual vloggers were not interviewed or quantitatively measured for learning outcomes. However, by systematically collecting vloggers' productions, this study provides a broader perspective on L2 vlogging on *Bilibili*, which could give insights into similar practices on global platforms such as *YouTube*. The analysis of learners' comments and self-disclosed information in their profiles highlights the potential of L2 vlogging for language learning. Although not all vlog genres were analyzed, the study provides insight into the most prominent genres and their distinguishing characteristics. Feedback from the audience was not analyzed, but the study identified various discursive strategies used by vloggers to interact with viewers, suggesting the formation of a Spanish-themed learning community on *Bilibili*.

In recent years, the development of L2 Spanish vlogging on *Bilibili* has become increasingly noticeable, and with more active uploaders, the number of L2 vlogs is expected to grow. Future studies could conduct longitudinal research on vloggers or expand the statistical analysis to gain a better understanding of language learners' experiences as vloggers. Another avenue for analysis is to consider vlogs as L2 input and examine their potential benefits for vocabulary learning (**Arndt**; **Woore**, 2018). Additionally, analyzing comments on foreign language vlogs on *Bilibili* could be a fruitful area for future research, given the increasing importance of online comments for informal learning. In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the emerging phenomenon of L2 vlogging on non-English social media and suggests that further research is needed to fully understand the potential of digital media for language learning.

## 7. Notes

1. A Chinese term that refers to internet celebrities or influencers who gained their fame and popularity through social media platforms, particularly in China. They often create and share their own content, including vlogs, on various social media platforms such as *Douyin*, *Weibo*, and *Xiaohongshu* (RED).

2. A teaching method that uses relaxation techniques and music to create a comfortable learning environment where students can absorb information more effectively. See **Lozanov** and **Gateva** (1988).

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