SYNTAX IN TIKTOK CAPTIONS: A STUDY OF SENTENCE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

Sabrina Salsabila[1], Nurul Fadilah Tambunan[2], Nadhifa Shofi Andara[3], Celli Geovanni[4], Siti Ismahani[5]
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara[1,2,3,4,5]
e-mail: sabrina0304233118@uinsu.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bentuk sintaksis dan fungsi kalimat yang terdapat dalam caption TikTok sebagai representasi komunikasi bahasa digital. TikTok merupakan platform media sosial yang memadukan konten visual dan teks, di mana caption berperan penting dalam membangun makna dan interaksi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan landasan teori sintaksis dari Chomsky, Givón, Halliday, O'Grady, dan Aarts. Data penelitian berupa tiga caption berbahasa Inggris yang diambil dari akun TikTok @beaulinaa, @Rikey, dan @lilly3ls. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa caption TikTok cenderung menggunakan kalimat sederhana dengan tingkat elipsis yang tinggi sebagai bentuk ekonomi bahasa, namun tetap mempertahankan struktur gramatikal yang dapat diterima. Dari segi fungsi, caption menampilkan keragaman fungsi pragmatik, seperti deklaratif, imperatif, dan ekspresif, yang digunakan untuk presentasi diri, pembentukan relasi sosial, serta peningkatan keterlibatan audiens. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa sintaksis caption TikTok membentuk ragam bahasa Inggris digital yang khas, yang menyeimbangkan kesederhanaan struktur sintaksis dengan efektivitas komunikasi dalam konteks media sosial.
Kata Kunci: *Sintaksis, Caption TikTok, Bentuk Kalimat, Fungsi Kalimat, Media Sosial, Komunikasi Digital*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the syntactic forms and sentence functions found in TikTok captions as a representation of digital language communication. TikTok is a social media platform that integrates visual content and text, in which captions play a significant role in conveying meaning and interaction. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on syntactic theories proposed by Chomsky, Givón, Halliday, O'Grady, and Aarts. The data consist of three English captions taken from the TikTok accounts @beaulinaa, @Rikey, and @lilly3ls. The findings reveal that TikTok captions predominantly use simple sentence structures with a high degree of ellipsis as a strategy of linguistic economy while maintaining acceptable grammatical patterns. In terms of function, the captions demonstrate pragmatic variation, including declarative, imperative, and expressive functions used for self-presentation, social relationship building, and audience engagement. These findings indicate that TikTok caption syntax represents a distinctive register of digital English that balances syntactic simplicity with communicative effectiveness in social media contexts.
Keywords: *Syntax, Tiktok Caption, Sentence Form, Sentence Function, Social Media, Digital Communication*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has significantly transformed patterns of human communication, particularly in digital environments. Among various platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential social media applications, integrating visual, auditory, and textual modes of communication. This multimodal nature allows users to convey meaning not only through videos but also through captions that accompany the content. Captions function as linguistic tools that provide context, express attitudes, and invite audience interaction. According to Pratiwi et al. (2022), TikTok facilitates powerful social communication due to its participatory and interactive characteristics, making language use on this platform an important object of linguistic inquiry.

Language used on TikTok differs considerably from conventional written language. Users tend to prioritize brevity, expressiveness, and immediacy in order to adapt to fast-paced content consumption. As a result, informal expressions and simplified sentence structures are frequently employed. Wardhana and Wiyanto (2025) argue that TikTok usage contributes to observable changes in users' language behavior, particularly among students. These changes indicate that social media platforms can actively shape linguistic practices. Therefore, TikTok language should be examined as a dynamic form of contemporary digital discourse.

Generation Z plays a central role in shaping linguistic trends on TikTok, as this group represents the platform's dominant user base. Their language use reflects creativity, identity construction, and group affiliation within digital communities. Qomariyah (2024) explains that language variations used by Generation Z on TikTok function as markers of social identity and in-group solidarity. These variations appear not only at the lexical level but also in syntactic constructions. Consequently, the language of TikTok captions demonstrates systematic patterns that warrant syntactic analysis.

From a global perspective, TikTok has become a site for the emergence of new linguistic structures. Ugoala (2024) notes that the language of Generation Z on TikTok often departs from standard grammatical conventions while remaining communicatively effective. Such structures frequently involve ellipsis and reduced forms that rely on shared contextual understanding. This phenomenon suggests that digital language operates according to its own norms and conventions. Linguistic studies must therefore account for the interaction between form, function, and digital context when analyzing TikTok captions.

In addition to structural variation, TikTok encourages the creation of neologisms and innovative linguistic forms. Hidayati et al. (2026) demonstrate that TikTok contributes to the emergence of new expressions that influence digital communication practices. These innovations are often motivated by the need for efficiency and audience engagement. Language in this context functions not only as a means of information delivery but also as a strategy for attracting attention. Such developments further highlight the importance of examining linguistic form and function in social media discourse.

In the Indonesian context, similar trends have been identified in studies of TikTok language use. Lisa et al. (2025) observe that language trends on TikTok significantly affect broader patterns of communication among Indonesian users. The platform promotes the use of informal language, abbreviations, and simplified sentence structures. These features gradually extend beyond digital spaces into everyday communication. This indicates that TikTok has a tangible impact on contemporary language practices in Indonesia.

Despite the growing number of studies addressing TikTok from sociolinguistic and lexical perspectives, research focusing specifically on syntactic forms and sentence functions

in TikTok captions remains limited. Captions play a crucial role in supporting visual content and shaping audience interpretation. Analyzing sentence structure and function in captions can provide deeper insight into how meaning is constructed in digital communication. Therefore, this study aims to examine the syntactic forms and sentence functions used in TikTok captions. This research is expected to contribute to the study of digital syntax and enhance understanding of linguistic patterns in social media communication.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to examine the syntactic forms and sentence functions of English-language TikTok captions. A qualitative approach is suitable because the research aims to describe linguistic phenomena in their natural digital context rather than measure them statistically. The data consist of three captions from @beaulinaa, @Rikey, and @lilly3ls, selected purposively for their representation of common linguistic patterns such as simple sentences, ellipsis, and multifunctional use. Data were collected through documentation by capturing screenshots and transcribing the captions to preserve authenticity. Analysis was conducted in stages: identifying syntactic structures, classifying sentences as simple, compound, or elliptical, and interpreting sentence functions using sentence function theory and speech act theory. The analysis referred to established theories by Chomsky (1965), Givón (2001), Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), O'Grady et al. (2017), and Aarts (2011). To ensure validity, interpretations were repeatedly reviewed, and multiple linguistic theories were applied for theoretical triangulation. This approach provides a systematic and credible description of syntactic patterns and communicative functions in TikTok captions as contemporary digital discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

This section presents the results of the syntactic and functional analysis of TikTok captions used as research data. The data consist of three English captions taken from different TikTok accounts, as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Each caption represents common linguistic patterns found in TikTok discourse and reflects distinctive syntactic characteristics.
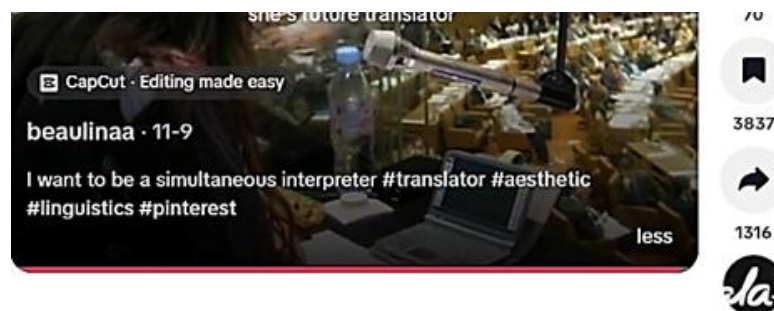

Figure 1. @beaulinaa Caption: "I want to be a simultaneous interpreter"

The syntactic analysis of the TikTok captions reveals variations in sentence structure while maintaining overall simplicity. The first data, taken from the caption "I want to be a simultaneous interpreter" posted by the account @beaulinaa, is presented in Figure 1. Based on Figure 1, the caption is classified as a simple sentence. It follows the Subject–Verb–Complement (S–V–C) pattern, where I functions as the subject, want to be serves as the

predicate, and a simultaneous interpreter acts as the complement. Based on the number of clauses, the sentence contains only one main clause. In terms of completeness, all obligatory elements are present, indicating that the caption represents a complete and grammatically well-formed sentence with a single main proposition.

Based on Figure 1, the caption "I want to be a simultaneous interpreter" primarily serves a declarative function with an expressive orientation. The caption conveys the speaker's personal aspiration, which corresponds to an expressive speech act. Although structurally declarative, the sentence functions to express desire rather than merely present factual information.

Figure 2. @Rikey Caption: "Richie Kayne haters can fight me"

The second data, derived from the caption "Richie Kayne haters can fight me" posted by the account @Rikey, is illustrated in Figure 2. As shown in Figure 2, this caption is categorized as a simple sentence. The caption follows the Subject–Verb–Object (S–V–O) pattern, with Richie Kayne haters functioning as the subject, can fight as the predicate, and me as the object. The sentence consists of one clause and includes all required syntactic elements, making it a complete sentence. Additionally, the presence of the modal verb can indicates the use of ability modality within the caption.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the caption "Richie Kayne haters can fight me" is grammatically declarative but pragmatically performs a provocative or directive function. The sentence carries an indirect illocutionary force that invites confrontation or reaction from the audience. Therefore, the caption represents an indirect speech act in which form and function do not fully coincide.
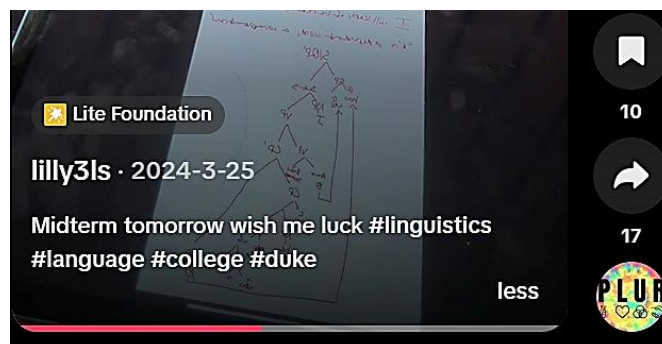

Figure 3. @lilly3ls Caption: "Midterm tomorrow wish me luck"

The third data, taken from the caption "Midterm tomorrow wish me luck" posted by the account @lilly3ls, is displayed in Figure 3. Based on Figure 3, this caption consists of two

clauses presented without an explicit conjunction, forming a compound construction. The first clause, *Midterm tomorrow*, functions as an elliptical declarative clause in which the verb is omitted but can be inferred from context, such as *there is* or *I have*. The second clause, *wish me luck*, is an imperative clause with an implicit subject *you*. Based on sentence completeness, both clauses are elliptical, and based on conjunction use, the caption is classified as an asyndetic construction. Functionally, the first clause serves a declarative role, while the second clause functions as an imperative.

Based on Figure 3, the caption "Midterm tomorrow wish me luck" demonstrates a combination of sentence functions. The first clause functions as a declarative statement providing information about an upcoming event, while the second clause functions as an imperative with expressive intent. In terms of speech act classification, the first clause represents an assertive act, whereas the second clause performs a directive act by requesting support from the audience.

Based on the data presented in Figures 1 to 3, several general characteristics of TikTok caption syntax can be identified. First, TikTok captions frequently employ linguistic economy through the use of ellipsis, as most clearly shown in Figure 3. Second, simple sentence structures dominate the captions, reflecting a preference for clarity and immediacy in digital communication. Third, captions often perform double functions or indirect speech acts, particularly when declarative forms are used to achieve expressive or directive purposes, as illustrated in Figure 2. Fourth, the use of personal pronouns such as *I* and *me* indicates a strong orientation toward personal experience and self-expression. Finally, the presence of modality and expressive elements shows that TikTok captions convey not only information but also emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal meanings.

Discussions

The results of this study indicate that TikTok captions predominantly employ simple syntactic structures while maintaining functional effectiveness in digital communication. This finding is consistent with Alwisa et al. (2025), who report that sentence simplicity is a defining feature of language use on TikTok due to the platform's emphasis on brevity and rapid content consumption. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Aarts (2011), who notes that English grammar allows for variation in sentence complexity while preserving grammaticality, and O'Grady et al. (2017), who emphasize that syntactic simplicity can enhance clarity and processing efficiency in real-time communication. Simple sentence forms enable messages to be processed quickly by audiences who interact with content in fast-scrolling environments. Despite their simplicity, the captions analyzed in this study remain grammatically acceptable, suggesting that syntactic economy does not necessarily compromise linguistic accuracy, which is in line with Chomsky's (1965) view that underlying grammatical competence allows for well-formed sentences even when surface structures are minimal.

The frequent use of ellipsis observed in the third caption reflects a common strategy in digital discourse to maximize efficiency. Givón (2001) highlights that elliptical constructions often rely on contextual or shared knowledge, allowing speakers to convey meaning without explicit syntactic completeness. Similar patterns are identified by Salsabila et al. (2024), who argue that non-standard sentence structures in digital contexts often rely on shared background knowledge rather than explicit grammatical completeness. Elliptical constructions allow users to convey meaning with minimal linguistic material while preserving comprehensibility. This supports the view that ellipsis in social media language functions as an adaptive strategy rather

than a deviation from linguistic norms. In functional terms, Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) suggest that ellipsis can serve multiple metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual by condensing information while maintaining interactional and expressive purposes.

In terms of sentence function, the findings demonstrate that TikTok captions frequently perform multiple communicative roles simultaneously. Declarative forms are often used to express emotions, attitudes, or indirect directives. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) emphasize that declaratives can function beyond pure information delivery, encoding interpersonal meaning and engaging audiences in subtle ways. Zainuddin and Karim (2025) highlight that such indirect speech acts are common in TikTok discourse, where users strategically employ declarative sentences to provoke responses or express stance. This multifunctionality reflects the interactive nature of social media, where captions are designed not only to inform but also to engage audiences.

The expressive dimension of TikTok captions is particularly evident in captions that convey personal aspirations or emotional states. Dewi (2025) notes that captions often function semantically as expressions of identity and personal experience, especially among Generation Z users. The use of first-person pronouns reinforces this expressive orientation, positioning the content creator as the central subject of the message. This finding aligns with Ginting et al. (2025), who emphasize that captions serve as a space for self-representation and emotional expression in digital environments. The presence of modal verbs and confrontational expressions further illustrates how TikTok captions encode stance and attitude. Apriliana and Rugaiyah (2025) observe that digital language frequently incorporates informal and non-standard forms to enhance expressivity and social impact. Modal constructions such as want and can contribute to the interpersonal meaning of captions by signaling desire, confidence, or challenge. These linguistic choices strengthen the pragmatic force of captions beyond their surface syntactic form, which can also be interpreted through Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) functional grammar framework.

Additionally, the findings support previous research on the influence of TikTok on broader linguistic practices among Generation Z. Jose (2025) notes that slang and informal expressions commonly appear in TikTok discourse as markers of group identity and social alignment. Although the captions analyzed in this study are relatively short, they still reflect broader trends of informality and creativity characteristic of digital language. This demonstrates that even minimal textual units like captions can carry complex social meanings. The interaction between syntactic form and pragmatic function also reveals the role of TikTok captions in fostering social engagement. Givón (2001) and O'Grady et al. (2017) suggest that flexibility in syntax and pragmatic adaptation is a hallmark of natural language use, particularly in contexts requiring rapid comprehension and social interaction. Khotimah et al. (2025) argue that digital language practices, including code-mixing and pragmatic flexibility, are closely linked to audience interaction and community building. In this study, captions function as prompts for audience response, whether through agreement, encouragement, or confrontation. This highlights the communicative orientation of TikTok captions as socially driven rather than purely informational.

Overall, the discussion confirms that TikTok caption syntax represents a distinctive register of digital language characterized by structural simplicity, pragmatic richness, and expressive orientation. The findings reinforce earlier studies that emphasize the adaptability of language in social media contexts while demonstrating that traditional syntactic concepts, as described by Chomsky (1965) and Aarts (2011), remain applicable when combined with

functional and pragmatic analysis. By examining both form and function, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in TikTok captions as a component of contemporary digital communication, bridging theoretical insights from generative, functional, and descriptive perspectives, including those of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), Givón (2001), and O'Grady et al. (2017).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok captions predominantly employ simple syntactic structures while serving complex communicative functions in digital discourse. The analysis shows that captions tend to use complete or elliptical simple sentences that prioritize brevity and clarity, reflecting the fast-paced nature of social media communication. Despite their structural simplicity, TikTok captions effectively convey meanings through expressive, directive, and informative functions.

The findings also demonstrate that ellipsis and indirect speech acts are key linguistic strategies in TikTok captions. These strategies allow users to communicate emotions, attitudes, and intentions efficiently while relying on shared contextual understanding between content creators and audiences. The frequent use of personal pronouns and modal verbs further highlights the expressive and interpersonal orientation of caption language.

Overall, this study confirms that TikTok captions represent a distinct form of digital language characterized by syntactic economy, pragmatic flexibility, and strong personal expression. By integrating syntactic and functional analysis, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how language adapts to social media environments and offers insights for future research on digital communication and linguistic change.

REFERENCES

Aarts, B. (2011). *Oxford modern English grammar*. Oxford University Press.

Alwisa, H., Aulia, S., Safitri, E. N., Ramadhani, S., & Pebriana, P. H. (2025). Analisis Sintaksis Bahasa Indonesia Dalam Konteks Penulisan Di Media Sosial (Tiktok). *Educazione: Jurnal Multidisiplin*, *2*(1), 102-119. https://doi.org/10.37985/educazione.v2i1.31

Apriliana, A., & Rugaiyah, R. (2025). A Morphological Analysis of Slang Words Used in Tiktok Content. *ISOLEK: Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengajaran, Bahasa, dan Sastra*, *3*(2), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.59638/isolek.v3i2.558

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. MIT Press.

Dewi, A. K. (2025). A Semantic Study of TikTok Post Captions from a Generation Z Language Perspective. *Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra*, *4*(6), 1641-1650. https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i6.983

Ginting, S. E. P. B., Bangun, S. E. B., Sigalingging, W. C., & Sari, Y. (2025). Analisis Semantik pada Caption/Keterangan Postingan Tiktok Berdasarkan Penggunaan Bahasa Generasi Z. *Jejak digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, *1*(4), 863-870. https://doi.org/10.63822/n63m5050

Givón, T. (2001). *Syntax: An introduction* (Vol. 1). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Hidayati, F., Dallyono, R., Kurniawan, E., & Yudistira, R. S. (2026). The Emergence of Neologisms and New Linguistic Forms that Impact Communication on TikTok. *e-Journal of Linguistics*, *20*(1), 15-29. https://doi.org/10.24843/e-jl.2026.v20.i01.p02

Jose, A. I. (2025). Exploring Slang Words on Social Media TikTok in 2024. *Linguistics and ELT Journal*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.31764/leltj.v13i1.31704

Khotimah, R. K., Nugraha, F., Livia, A. W., Mutiara, G., & Ismail, D. (2025). The Impact Of Social Media Tik Tok On The Use Of Code Mixing By Generation Z. *BIANTARA: Journal of Language and Culture*, *1*(2). https://journal.widyatama.ac.id/index.php/jbb/article/view/2685

Lisa, L. A. W., Fitrah, Y., & Karim, M. (2025). Exploring Language Trends on TikTok: Impacts on Indonesian Communication. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, *13*(2), 3962-3973. https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.6271

O'Grady, W., Archibald, J., Aronoff, M., & Rees-Miller, J. (2017). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction* (7th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Pratiwi, W., Sabrina, M. K., & Rahyadi, I. (2022). Exploring The Power of Social Communication on Tiktok Through a Qualitative Literature Review. *Syntax Literate; Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, *7*(11), 17863-17876. https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v7i11.12633

Qomariyah, N. (2024). Use of language variations on tiktok social media in generation z. *INTERDISIPLIN: Journal of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, *1*(3), 140-153. https://doi.org/10.61166/interdisiplin.v1i3.33

Salsabila, D., Faira, N., Nazhwandini, A. A., Harahap, D. A. & Ismahani, S. (2024). Analyzing the Syntactic Patterns of Gen Z English: The Use of Non-Standard Sentence Structure in Digital Discourse. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Sastra Inggris*, *4*(2), 89–101. https://doi.org/10.55606/jupensi.v4i2.5106

Sulistiyarini, S., & Prasetyo, G. T. (2024). Language Variations of Adolescents on Tiktok Social Media. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, *8*(1), 33-42. https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v8i1.1432

Ugoala, B. (2024). Generation Z's lingos on TikTok: Analysis of emerging linguistic structures. *Journal of Language and Communication*, *11*(2), 211-224. https://doi.org/10.47836/jlc.11.02.08

Wardhana, A., & Wiyanto, M. S. (2025). Tiktok As A Social Media Influence On Language Change Among Students Of Itebis Pgri Dewantara Jombang. *JEELL (Journal of English Education, Linguistics and Literature)*, *12*(3), 280-289. https://doi.org/10.32682/jeell.v12i3.96

Zainuddin & Karim. (2025). Language and gender on social media: A critical discourse analysis of TikTok comments. *JALC: Journal of Applied Linguistic and Studies of Cultural, 3*(1), Mei 2025. https://doi.org/10.65787/jalc.v3i1.555