

Reasons for using YouTube in the language classroom including practical usage examples

James York

Tokyo Denki University
yorksensei@gmail.com

Recent statistical data regarding YouTube reveals two important factors that may be utilized by language teachers. This paper initially outlines several theoretical considerations for the use of video in such contexts before developing an argument regarding the value of this data and appeal of YouTube in language learning contexts. Following this, the paper gives an overview of the exploitable statistical data on YouTube, which is presented with a focus on the possible motivational, affective and cognitive influences implied. Subsequently, the second half of the paper is dedicated to introducing practical YouTube-based activities that teachers may use or modify to suit their individual teaching contexts.

Introduction

Video-based methodologies for language learning are certainly not a new concept. A quick online search brings up various papers dating back to the 1980s, including a practical report on video-based activities by Wilkinson (1984) for use in “intermediate level language courses” (p. 84). The increased availability and reduction in price of video players, camcorders, and other video-capable devices allowed more and more teachers to start to experiment with video in their various working contexts. Keeping a focus on language classrooms, video is often considered an alternative or replacement to ‘traditional’ media used in listening comprehension activities such as cassette tapes and CDs (e.g., Wilkinson, 1984).

With the global propagation of the Internet-based video source YouTube, video has evolved from the traditional view of **207**

pre-recorded medium on **VHS** or **DVD**. We now have on-demand video regarding almost any subject imaginable. In this article, a number of reasons for the usage of video in language learning (**L2**) contexts are introduced before expanding this argument to the use of various videos found on YouTube. The secondary aim of the paper is to present several practical activities based on videos from YouTube, all of which can be modified in accordance with teachers' individual pedagogical needs.

Literature review

This section begins with an introduction to the cognitive reasons for the inclusion of video in language classrooms, making reference to previous relevant studies. Following this, affective reasons are introduced with a focus on how videos available from YouTube may influence students' motivation to study.

Cognitive reasons for the use of audio-visuals

Listening activities typically require students to listen to and then answer comprehension questions based on a conversation, interaction or discussion between two or more people. If video involving human speech in an interactive context is used in such cases, students can successfully interpret body language, or other non-verbal, paralinguistic information, which may aid their comprehension. A study by Herron (1995) suggests that when a visual stimulus is used in conjuncture with spoken language, student comprehension scores improved significantly. Such claims are also reinforced by Lake (2003) who cites Asher (1993) in saying that there must be an image attached to the mental representation of a word in order to retain and use it. Numerous other studies also support the use of video in language classrooms based on the importance of including non-verbal, paralinguistic components of communication to assist learners in their understanding and construction of meaning when conducting listening activities (for example Gruba, 2004; Hasan, 2000; Shin, 1998).

Literature on the use of video in the **L2** classroom suggests that it may help students to visualize word meanings. For example, Iwasaki (2009) writes, "Visuals can help dramatize meaning" (p. 3). In keeping with this idea, Shrosbree (2008) provides us with a quote that underpins the notion for considering video over audio-only sources for listening activities:

There is an obvious appeal to using video in the language classroom. Instead of the rather unnatural task of listening to a disembodied voice emanating from an audio player, learners are able to see the speaker and elements of the surrounding environment (p. 75).

Indeed, even as native speakers, when we interact or converse with others, we usually see their faces. If we consider instances of interaction that are not face-to-face – such as in computer-mediated-communication – for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, a huge range of emotion icons (i.e. emoticons) and other visual representations of paralinguistic cues are employed as a substitute for face-to-face contact, implying that paralinguistic (or body language) cues are an important part of communication (Joy, 2009). Additionally, the multi-sensory aspect of video may help reduce the cognitive demands on learners, where the more senses utilized when acquiring new language, the easier this

The cognitive support provided by video in language classrooms has been studied where some, such as Medina, find that it may help second language learners acquire vocabulary and grammar, improve spelling and develop the linguistic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening” (2002, p. 1). Additionally, Weyers (1999) found that video-based instruction appears to improve students oral production and in particular confidence in their speech. However, in contrast to these studies, Wagner (2007) has argued that it is unknown as to whether students learn from what they hear or from what they see. Wood (1999) also argues that video alone does not provide sufficient impetus for language learning, however, when used with appropriate support material, can “activate the passive knowledge of language learners in particular, and assist with language assimilation and transfer, both in terms of that language presented as well as that which is implicitly suggested” (p. 95).

Audiovisuals appeal to multiple learning styles

This section shall attempt to show that not all learners learn in the same way. According to the **VARK** guide to learning styles – a comprehensive guide to learning styles by Fleming (2001) – learners can be classified into either one or the other of the following four main learning styles or have two or more learning preferences (aka. multimodal):

- ✧ Visual –process knowledge from maps, charts, spider diagrams etc.
- ✧ Aural – prefer information that is spoken or heard.
- ✧ Reading (or writing) – prefer to receive information via the written word.
- ✧ Kinesthetic – process knowledge through bodily sensations (Gardner, 2006). The key point about kinesthetic learners is that they can learn from either real or *simulated* experiences, which can be interpreted as learning from movies, or other models of the foreign language in use.

From looking at the four learning styles, we can see that completing a listening activity via a **CD** (assuming aural only information) would be an appropriate source of input for the aural learners. However, using a video (aural and visual information) seems appealing to multiple learning styles: aural, visual and kinesthetic learners.

Affective reasons for the use of audiovisuals

According to the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), teachers have an obligation to provide learners with not only an abundance of interesting, meaningful and relevant learning materials, but additionally create a learning environment that helps to lower their affective filter. This links to theories of motivations, which suggest that learner motivation may be directly related to language acquisition, and the higher a learner’s motivation is, the easier a language is acquired.

This paper argues that YouTube may provide suitable learning material to effect students’ motivation and affective filter in a positive way. Among the results of a recent statistical analysis of YouTube, two statistics in particular help outline my argument and have implications regarding how YouTube may be exploited in the language classroom, according to Metekohy (2010):

- ✧ 70% of YouTube traffic comes from outside the **US**.
- ✧ 24 hours of video is uploaded every minute.

The first statistic tells us that our students may very well be familiar with YouTube. If they are familiar with the medium, it may help lower the affective filter (Krashen 1982), and in turn increase student motivation. Unlike a compulsory textbook, which students associate specifically with L2, they may associate YouTube with time spent having fun in their free time – a factor that may increase student motivation.

The second statistic shows that there is an abundance of material available from youtube.com, some of which may be of use for pedagogical purposes. Although too much choice may make it hard to choose suitable teaching material, with in-built search facilities and related videos appearing on the same web page, YouTube can be navigated intuitively, and videos can be found with little difficulty. Therefore, YouTube may present language teachers with a useable medium for introducing language points, finding topics for discussion, or examples of authentic English, with proper guidance and suggested videos available on the site. Additionally, with 24 hours of new video being uploaded each minute, educators can use videos relating to news stories in real time as they unfold.

Attention should be taken when selecting videos for use with young or adolescent learners due to the adult nature of some YouTube videos. Although registered users can only access videos with particularly strong adult themes, many videos may contain inappropriate language or themes with mild violence or sexual references. Some videos may also contain images or themes that are considered controversial or indecent to some cultures, so teachers should be careful when searching for videos on YouTube to use as appropriate teaching materials.

Implications of the "15 Minute Upload Limit"

Regular YouTube accounts are limited to uploading videos of a maximum length of 15 minutes. This has very positive implications for language teachers and learners. With a limit set to 15 minutes, we find users creating short and concise movies, animations, product reviews, etc. that start and finish within this time period. In other words, without looking too far, complete stories with a start, middle, and end that only last up to 15 minutes can be found on YouTube. Using such a complete story compared to isolating a specific scene from a feature-length movie on DVD, here are some advantages for teachers:

- ✧ Context is usually outlined as the story progresses, meaning that students do not need to be given context-setting information before watching. Conversely then, using short stories or movies can promote students to pay attention to or think about contextual information as it appears.
- ✧ Canning (2000) suggests that video should be shown in short periods as apposed to showing a full feature-length movie without intermediate comprehension activities. With a 15-minute time limit, YouTube seems to offer video in a 'bite-size' format of appropriate length, allowing the teacher to conduct comprehension activities afterwards, and if necessary replay the video in its entirety, without losing the attention of students.
- ✧ The theme of the video/movie is often narrow, which implies that students can brainstorm concepts or vocabulary they think will be relevant before watching.

The second part of the paper introduces four different activities using videos found on YouTube. Two of the activities appear under the same heading as they are not completely unique activities, but two variations of one activity.

Activities using YouTube 1: Two ways of doing a dictogloss

The first way is to do a traditional dictogloss activity, with the use of video to aid student comprehension. Preparation for this activity requires the teacher to create a short narrative text based on the contents of a chosen YouTube video before the lesson is carried out in class. The lesson plan follows:

1. **Preparation stage:** The teacher explains each stage of the dictogloss activity and prepares the learners by introducing the topic and important vocabulary from the text. Students could also be asked to brainstorm vocabulary that they think may be relevant to the topic.
2. **Dictation stage:** The learners listen to a text read by the teacher at least two times. Standard procedure is for them to not write anything during the first listening to maximize potential comprehension and to get a feeling for the whole text. During the second listening, the learners take notes to help them reconstruct the text, and following the reading they start to reconstruct the text individually.
3. **Reconstruction stage:** Learners work together in small groups to reconstruct the text.

It is at this point where teachers may choose to show the video that the dictogloss text is based on. The reason being that at this point students are undertaking the most demanding part of the dictogloss activity meaning that motivation towards completing the task can start to decrease. Showing students a video of the text they have just heard is an excellent source of motivation as they can compare their stories to the visual, as well as their own notes. The visual clues in the video can also be a good prompt to things they have missed out of their dictation.

4. **Analysis and correction stage:** Learners check and compare their reconstructions as a whole class. Individual groups' reconstructions are compared to the original text to confirm which differences are acceptable.

The second way is a modified version of the above dictogloss activity where instead of the teacher creating and reading a text to students, they watch the chosen video and then think about how they could narrate it. I have included a dictogloss worksheet to help understand how to complete this activity in the appendix.

1. Again, start with students brainstorming vocabulary around a specific subject, or give them a premade word cloud¹ to discuss with their groups/partners.
2. Show students the video that you want them to narrate.
3. Students write words from the movie that they think may be useful onto their worksheet. It is a good idea to get students to check the words with each other to increase the amount of words each student has written.
4. Watch the video again. Before the viewing though, tell students to think about how they could illustrate what happens in six (or however many you designate) frames similar to a comic. Give students a time limit to complete their drawings. This is not an art class!
5. After they have completed their storyboards, have students create a caption underneath each picture describing what happens in each scene.
6. Finally there are two follow-up options: (1) have students read their captions to each other so that they can compare their linguistic accuracy (but more importantly, other peoples take on the story); and/or (2) play the video one more time, and have students give their narrations individually, or to the rest of the class as it plays.

This is one of my favourite YouTube based activities and the author has written about it in more detail, including examples of student work on my blog².

Activities using YouTube 2: Getting the most out of music videos

Songs are typically used in **ESL/FL** classrooms as a source for listening activities. Such activities include cloze-gap exercises, counting how many times a particular word is said, discussing what the song means, or describing how the song makes you feel. The same type of activity can of course be completed if a music video is used, but using a music video means that additional comprehension or extension activities may be created.

The original idea for this activity was found in Iwasaki (2009) where she outlines various ways audio-visuals can be used as teaching materials. This particular lesson uses the song “Fight for Your Right to Party” (Beastie Boys, 1986) to teach about American subculture, specifically the rebellious nature of adolescents, slang terms, and colloquial English usage. I propose ways in which the video may be used as the source for both listening and speaking activities.

There are a number of activities that could be implemented based on this song:

- ✂ Spot the lyrics – How many times do you hear each word?
- ✂ Focus on the lyrics – Rhyming used in rap or slang words in general.
- ✂ Contrast with the way students behave in Japan – Similarities and differences.
- ✂ Speak about rebellious things have you done and compare with a partner.

All of the above activities could be completed without the video. However, when using video, we are able to create even more expansion activities. In this example, the video shows a number of youths doing things that are considered rebellious. An extension activity could be for students to identify such rebellious acts from the video. Once they have done this, they could then compare their notes with their partner, or the rest of the class.

When using video in **L2** classrooms it is important to make sure that there is a specific reason for using it. If the same activity can be completed using an audio source only, then why use video? It is only going to be seen as a distraction if not fully utilized.

Activities using YouTube 3: What happens next?

A simple activity that can get students thinking is the “What happens next” activity (Keddie, 2010). The activity requires students to guess what will happen after the teacher pauses a video halfway through. One positive aspect of this activity is that it appeals to a whole range of student ability levels and ages. The basic structure for this activity is given below.

1. Make sure the video is in full screen mode before you show it to students. The reason for this is that most video titles actually give away the ending.
2. Play the video to students and check comprehension at key points. Introduce new vocabulary if necessary.
3. Give hints as to who the main characters or people in the video are.
4. Ask students to guess what they think will happen. If necessary, provide students with the start of an example sentence: “I think ... is going to [will] ...”

To motivate students to write, Keddie suggests that students should be told to “be as

imaginative as possible and that everyone must write something down if they want to see the end of the clip”.

5. Students write down what they think will happen on paper.
6. The teacher collects in the papers, highlights any trends, and corrects errors.
7. Finally, play the end of the video and praise those students who guessed correctly.

The next activity uses a video titled, “Kid slam dunks **HIMSELF**” to demonstrate the basic framework in more detail.

1. After making sure the video is in full screen mode, start the video.
2. Pause the video at around 10 seconds and ask students what they think is going to happen. Words such as *dunk [a ball]*, *basketball*, *net*, and *[jump on a] trampoline* can be elicited here. It may also be important to outline that there are often performances during the breaks at basketball games.
3. After the performers have completed their first show (around the 35 seconds mark), elicit some more vocabulary and phrases such as *acrobat*, *bounce [off the backboard]*, *[do a] somersault*, *spin [in the air]* and *gorilla*.
4. Continue to watch the video until around 1:25 and explain that there is one more performance to come and that you would like them to guess what the man (who dunks himself) is going to do. If necessary, give them the start of the sentence: “I think he is going to...”
5. At this point, students write their predictions and hand them in.
6. Go through their submissions, correct errors and watch the end of the video.

As a follow up activity, students can be asked to review what they wrote with “I thought he was going to...” reviewing the structure “was going to”.

Conclusion

This article looked at a number of reasons for using YouTube in L2 classrooms with a focus on cognitive and affective reasons. Consideration was also given to students’ different learning styles. While some studies have been inconclusive regarding the benefit of video in L2 contexts, I have argued that video is useful in reducing cognitive load on learners and appeals to multiple learning styles. Affective reasons for the use of video was argued from the standpoint that there is a good possibility that are students are familiar with YouTube which could have an positive influence on their motivation.

The second half of the article introduced a number of activities based on YouTube videos. Two ways of doing a dictogloss were introduced including a modified version specifically for use with silent movies found on YouTube to hone narrative/story-telling skills. The use of music videos instead of CDs (audio-only sources) was also introduced with the key point being that there must be a specific reason for using the video version. Expansion activities based on the visual are thus recommended. Finally, an activity using *bloopers* or other funny videos found on YouTube was introduced as the impetus for a ‘what happens next’ activity.

Notes

1. Word clouds are an excellent way to introduce vocabulary and can be created at: <http://www.wordle.net/>

2. <http://yorksensei.blogspot.com> for more information.
3. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km1KanJziac>

References

- Beastie Boys. (1986). Fight for your right to party! In, *Licensed to Ill*. Universal International, **MTV**: Japan.
- Canning C. (2000). Practical aspects of using video in the foreign language classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, [Online]. 6(11). Available at: <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Canning-Video.html> [Accessed January 21, 2011].
- Fleming, N. (2001). **VARX** – A guide to learning styles, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp> [Accessed January 26, 2011].
- Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons*. Basic Books: New York, **USA**.
- Gruba, P. (2004). Understanding digitized second language videotext. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 17(1), 51–82.
- Hasan, A. (2000). Learners' perceptions of listening comprehension problems. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13, 137–153.
- Herron, C. (1994). An investigation of the effectiveness of using an advance organizer to introduce video in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 78(2), 190–198.
- Iwasaki, I. (2009). Edutainment for the **EFL** classroom: Exploring effective use of audiovisuals. *Hannan University's Cultural and Natural Science Essays*, 45(1), 1–18.
- Joy, S. (2009). Lost in translation: Emotion and expression through technology. http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/87/ [Accessed January 30, 2011].
- Keddie, J. (2010). *What happens next? II*, [Online]. Available at: <http://lessonstream.org/2010/02/24/what-happens-next-ii/> [Accessed December 12, 2010].
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practices in second language acquisition*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Lake, R. (2002). Enhancing acquisition through music. *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching*, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.njcu.edu/cill/vol7/lake.html> [Accessed January 28, 2011].
- Medina, S. (2002). *Using music to enhance second language acquisition: From theory to practice*, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.forefrontpublishers.com/eslmusic/articles/06.htm> [Accessed December 15, 2010].
- Metekohy, M. (2010). *YouTube statistics*, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.viralblog.com/research/youtube-statistics/> [Accessed December 18, 2010].
- Shin, D. (1998). Using video-taped lectures for testing academic language. *International Journal of Listening*, 12, 56–79.
- Shrosbree, M. (2008). Digital video in the language classroom. *The JALT CALL Journal*, 4(1), 75–84.
- Swaffar, J. & Vlatton, A. (1997). A sequential model for video viewing in the foreign language curriculum. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81(2), 175–188.
- Wagner, E. (2007). Are they watching? Test-taker viewing behavior during an L2 video listening test. *Language Learning & Technology*, 11(1), 67–86.
- Weyers, J. (1999). The effect of authentic video on communicative competence. *Modern Language Journal*, 83(3), 339–353.

Wilkinson, R. (1984). Video-based learning activities. *TESL Canada Journal*, 1(2), 83–86.
 Wood, D. (1999). Aspects of video movie English teaching. *Journal of Chikushi Jogakuin University*, 11, 93–104.

Author biodata

James York has taught a wide range of age levels from kindergarten to university students. He is currently employed at Tokyo Denki University as a full-time English lecturer. He is committed to performing classroom-based research, where his research interests include implementing Web 2.0 technologies in the **EFL** classroom and the relationship to student motivation.

Appendix

The dictogloss worksheet

Name _____ Student Number _____ Date _____

Useful Words

Draw the story in six scenes then write a caption to explain what is going on.

1 English:	2 English:
3 English:	4 English:
5 English:	6 English: