

# OBSERVATION OF *YOUTUBE* LANGUAGE LEARNING VIDEOS (*YOUTUBE LLVS*)

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## **Abstract**

This paper navigates into the *YouTube* website as one of the most usable online tools to learn languages these days. The paper focuses on two issues in creating *YouTube* language learning videos: pedagogy and technology.

After observing the existing *YouTube* LLVs, the study presents a novel rubric that is directed towards a pedagogically sound basis for language learning in the *YouTube* learning environment. The purposes of the rubric are. A: selecting and evaluating the appropriate *YouTube* language videos for the target audience. B: creating effective language learning *YouTube* videos that are based on the existing language learning theories.

The findings present a rubric that contains 44 questions that have been classified in five main categories: video characteristic, attractiveness, clarity, reaction and content. In each category, there are several questions discussing issues under each category. These questions are driven and modified from the language materials evaluation and design research and language classroom observations research.

## **1. Introduction**

In February 2005, three former PayPal employees created the *YouTube* Website. The purpose of the website is to upload, view and share short videos. Soon, the website has gained the popularity and many people subscribe to it. The popularity of the website has drawn the attention of *Google* Company leaders. They have realized the potential role that *YouTube* will play in the people's life in terms of education, health, politics and economy. So, the company acquired the website in 2006. In the current design of the *YouTube* website, there are several categories where people can find what they are interested in such as education, music, news and sports.

*YouTube* is a very attractive social medium that contributes to the global education (Bonk, 2009). It is being increasingly used by educators to teach the English language (Duffy, 2008). It "offers fast and fun access to language and culture-based videos and instruction from all over the

globe” (Terantino, 2011, p. 11). In other words, *YouTube* is making new demands on learning that are changing the learning ecology (Kwan et al., 2008). Every year, *YouTube* official website <http://www.YouTube.com> shares astonishing statistics about the use of the *YouTube* worldwide. According to the press link “[http://www.YouTube.com/t/press\\_statistics](http://www.YouTube.com/t/press_statistics)”, *YouTube* is localized in 43 countries and across 60 languages, *YouTube* had more than 1 trillion views or around 140 views for every person on the Earth. 100 million people take a social action on *YouTube* (likes, shares, comments, etc) every week. These statistics show the influence of *YouTube* on sharing information and knowledge with other people.

Due to the popularity of the website, its free-of-charge availability and easiness of use, many language teachers have started to use the website to teach different languages by uploading language learning videos. Language learners around the world like these videos, and some of these videos have reached millions of views. For example, this video titled “Learning English - Lesson One (Introduction)” has more than 8 millions views so far; see <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ohJCdihPWqc>.

However, there is little literature that discusses the use of *YouTube* LLVs in language education. In addition, language teachers might not find clear guidelines that help them to utilize this technology in their careers. Based on second language acquisition theory, previous research, and language learning and teaching practices, this paper presents a comprehensive guideline to observe and create an effective inventory of *YouTube* LLVs. The aims of this paper are to guide *YouTube* LLVs creators to make their videos more effective as well as link the language literature with the *YouTube* technology.

## **2. Observation in language education**

The literature has stressed the importance of observation in language research and practice (Brown, 2001, Crookes, 2004, Day, 1990, Gebhard, 1999, Mackey & Gass, 2005, & Wajnryb, 1992). Observation is “a non-judgmental description of classroom events that can be analyzed and given interpretation” (Gebhard, 1999, p. 35). It describes the learning environment that includes all the elements in the learning process such as the teachers, the students, the materials to be used, the place where the learning is conducted. It illustrates how these components interact to achieve the learning outcomes.

Based on these descriptive data gained by observation, educational language specialists such as teachers, supervisors and school managers make judgments about the scope of success or failure to achieve the outcomes of the learning processes. Following these judgments, language specialists provide suggestions and pieces of advice for teachers to improve the learning environments. This process helps instructors to treat the weak points, keep up successful work, delete unnecessary works and include required works in the learning environment. *YouTube* is an example of the learning environment where learning is happening.

Observation is necessary for teacher training (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Maingay, 1988; Sheal, 1989; Wajnryb, 1992; Wallace, 1991). It helps pre-service teachers to have an image about the learning environment they will encounter after their training programs. Observation is also necessary for the existing expert teachers because the learning environments are changed consistently. Language classrooms in the 1990s are different than the current language classrooms in terms of the available technology, textbooks and students. In addition, problems are randomly generated in the learning environment. By observing, teachers can identify learning problems and their sources and can look for solutions (Randal & Thornton 2001). One point to be stressed here is that observation should be accurate and objective (Allright, 1988, & Wajnryb, 1992). This will lead one to “construct and reconstruct our own knowledge about teaching and thereby learn more about ourselves as teachers” (Gebhard, 1999, p. 35).

There are five purposes for observation in educational sitting (Gebhard, 1999):

1. to evaluate teaching,
2. to learn to teach,
3. to learn to observe,
4. to collect data for research purposes,
5. to make teachers more self-aware.

Teachers can observe themselves while they are teaching (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). They can video themselves or record their voices while they are teaching. They can develop their teaching skills while they observe other teachers (Fanselow 1988). Teachers can compare their teaching styles to other teachers in order to see different teaching strategies and methodologies that other language teachers use in their classrooms. Recognizing the importance of using

technology in language education for observation purposes started in 1980s. Day (1990) stresses that:

Audio and video recordings permit teachers to see and hear themselves as their students see and hear them. They are the most neutral techniques for observation. Along with their complete objectivity, audio and video recordings have the potential of capturing the essence of the classroom, and can be listened to or viewed over and over, allowing the participants to agree on an interpretation of an event or behavior. (p. 46).

*YouTube* LLVs would fall into the video recordings as complete language lessons that usually do not require supplementary language materials. This shows the efficiency that technology plays in education in general. However, new technology should be linked with the current language learning and teaching theories and practices to enlighten the future of language learning. The following section provides a set of guidelines to create and observe *YouTube*LLVs based on the current language learning and teaching literature.

### **3. The guidelines for evaluating *YouTube* LLVs**

In this section, five categories of creating and observing *YouTube* LLVs will be discussed from the language research perspectives. As observation can take place after teaching or while teaching, this observational procedure is designed to observe language learning *YouTube* videos after they have been uploaded to the *YouTube* website. Watching videos and observing them “allow the researcher to analyze language use in greater depth” (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This is a structured observation where pre-specified categories help the observer to gather more objective data about the language lesson (Mackey & Gass, 2005, Wallace, 1998). The difference between language classroom observation and *YouTube* LLVs observation is that the observation in the former is happening while the teachers are teaching. The observers are doing the observation while the teaching process is taking place. On the other hand, the *YouTube* LLVs observations are conducted after teaching has taken place. In addition, this procedure can be a helpful tool for language teachers to look at before they create their language learning videos.

This evaluative procedure is designed for *YouTube* LLVs that usually do not require anyone to explain them. Students do not need other language teachers to explain what the teachers teach in the *YouTube* LLVs. The difference between textbooks as language learning materials and *YouTube* videos is that textbooks usually require language teachers to explain them.

Considering the *YouTube* LLVs as language learning materials, the common criteria of evaluating language textbooks which can be used to evaluate the *YouTube* LLVs are recycling of information, assessing the knowledge, appropriateness of culture and age, the clarity of the content and motivation. The 44 questions are grouped in five categories in order to make them easy to use for creating new *YouTube* LLVs or observing and evaluating the existing ones.

#### ***A= Video characteristics***

The first category concerns more the technical parts of the video such as the quality of sound and the quality of images. The quality of sounds and images affects the quality of the lesson. Creating *YouTube* LLVs with poor quality of sounds might prevent students from understanding the teachers. For example, the teachers' pronunciation might not be clear. Abu-Rabia & Kehat (2004) stress that the quality of the input affects language acquisition. In addition, this category draws the observer's attention to the length of the video, the tags that are associated with the video and the category that the video was labeled under. For detailed questions, see Appendix, Category A.

#### ***B= Attractiveness***

The second category used to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of *YouTube* LLVs is attractiveness. This category contains five questions that address motivation, anxiety, relevance and emotional appeal. The questions in this category tap into these aspects to provide more appropriate judgments for the observers. Students should enjoy their *YouTube* LLVs in order to keep watching them. As Cives-Enriques states, "if the students of any discipline enjoy what they are doing, they will at least make the effort to learn" (cited in Tomlinson, 2003, p. 240). According to Bernaus & Gardner (2008), anxiety prevents students from acquiring the language and impedes the language learning process. Moreover, the video should contain relevant elements such as images, music and subtitles. Dörnyei (2007) stresses that language materials should be relevant to the learners because they do care about their learning. For detailed questions, see Appendix, Category B.

#### ***C= Clarity:***

The third category to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of *YouTube* LLVs is clarity. It encompasses questions that address teacher's preparation, body language, voice speed and

lesson's materials. Wajnryb (1992) stressed the importance of teachers' preparation for the lessons they will teach. Richards & Lockhart (1994) clarify that successful language teachers try to prepare their lesson, speak not fast nor slowly and use good body language. Teachers sometimes need to be precise and point out the focus on form in a grammar lesson by highlighting them or writing them in different colors. Using subtitles or notes during the *YouTube* LLVs will help the students to acquire the language. "Captions are beneficial because they result in greater depth of processing by focusing attention, reinforce the acquisition of vocabulary through multiple modalities, and allow learners to determine meaning through the unpacking of language chunks" (Winke et al., 2010, p. 81). Moreover, Erben et al. (2009) state that English language learners look at the teacher's body language and facial expressions in *YouTube* Videos to encode the meaning of the sentences and phrases. For detailed questions, see Appendix, Category C.

#### ***D= Reaction***

When considering *YouTube* website as a learning environment, it needs to be remembered that the roles of the teachers are not limited to publishing videos on *YouTube*. Teachers should follow their videos by answering students' questions, clarifying some points and deleting inappropriate comments under their videos to keep the *YouTube* website a more learnable environment. Coulson (1967, p. 1) clarifies that the effectiveness of self study materials will increase "if the teacher actively augmented the instruction by rephrasing difficult program items, adding examples, working through the program problems with the student, and branching the student to different parts of the program". The *YouTube* website is a self-study language resource that needs teachers to actively augment it. For detailed questions, see Appendix, Category D.

#### ***E= Content***

The last category in the evaluation procedure is called content. It focuses on the information in the *YouTube* LLVs such as the title, the introduction, the assessment and the conclusion. For example, writing a relevant title of the content of the video will help learners to predict the content of the lesson. According to McDonough and Shaw (2003), prediction helps students to create clues that enable them to understand the meaning of the learning task. Moreover, reading the title of the video, reading the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of the video and seeing

images that related to the content in the video and listening to the narration that related to the content at the beginning of the video will help students activate their prior knowledge. According to King-Friedrichs (2001), Rumelhart (1997), and Dunkel (1986), activating schemata helps students to understand the lesson since it utilizes their prior knowledge and motivates them to accomplish the lesson's activities.

Setting goals and objectives will help students to understand the video content, concentrate more since they have attended goals to be achieved at the end of the learning task and reduce the burden of listening or watching a long conversation (Vandergrift, 2002, Ur, 1984). Another point that is mentioned in this category is authenticity of the content. As Saraceni (2003, p. 77) states, "materials should be based on authentic texts, that is texts which have been written for any purpose other than language teaching". For detailed questions, see Appendix, Category E.

#### **4. Suggestions for creating *YouTube* LLVs**

Based on the observation guidelines that were supported by the literature, we can come to some suggestions that will help language teachers to create effective *YouTube* LLVs. However, these ideas might not be applicable to all *YouTube* LLVs that language teachers create or observe. To create more effective *YouTube* LLVs, language teachers should pay attention to the following points.

First of all, *YouTube* LLVs require preparation. Before starting the *YouTube* LLVs, instructors should try to visualize the lesson on a map and see what it will look like and what materials they need such as software, websites, flashcards, personal assistants etc. Using the resources that are available and accessible might be sufficient to create effective lessons. There are free educational resources that are available online. For example, language teachers can create and edit videos by using free video editing software such as *Windows Movie Maker*. Creating effective *YouTube* LLVs might require a camera, a microphone, video editing software, music, images, video clips, slides, websites' pages and related realia that are necessary for the lesson. For example, creating a lesson about fruits might necessitate the use of real fruits or their pictures to show them to students.

After preparing the needed materials, teachers might start videoing the lesson. The first point is choosing an attractive thumbnail of the video. Thumbnail is the picture of the video that is shown in the research engines. Putting an attractive thumbnail will encourage the *Youtubers* to

click on particular videos among many videos that will be shown in the research results or as related to the video they are watching. During the first seconds of the lesson, *YouTube* LLVs creators might include an introduction about their organizations or their *YouTube* channel combining that with music and attractive images. This will give the *YouTubers* a clear idea about who they are if they are affiliated with an organization, a school, a university or a language passionate teacher. Adding music will motivate learners to keep watching the video and will decrease their anxiety. Another point is writing the title that really reflects the video content. Writing an attractive title that does not reflect the content of the lesson will frustrate the *YouTubers* once they have found that the video is not the one that they are looking for. So, they might dislike the video and that will show more redline under the video. This might lead to removing the video from the *YouTube* website.

While designing the lesson, the three-stage format is the most appropriate:

**1. Introduction stage:** *YouTube* LLVs creators should write the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of the video so that learners will have an idea what they will achieve at the end of watching the video. The introduction should have motivational music and images that will decrease students' anxiety and motivate them to watch the video. Keeping this stage as short as possible is a good idea.

**2. Main stage:** This is the stage where teachers deliver the main content of the lesson. It varies based on the purpose of the lesson. However, there are some points teachers might need to keep in mind. The pace should be slow if the video is targeted at beginners, the pace can be as regular native speed if the target students are advanced. The background music should be as silent as possible. As language research suggests, teachers should repeat the important words and phrases and explain difficult terms. In *YouTube* LLVs teachers can show the important words as subtitles to help learners to see the spelling. Karakaş and Sariçoban (2102) suggest that language teachers should “incorporate only the keywords as subtitles since the whole subtitled sentences make it difficult for learners to follow the flow of speech, as they either concentrate on the speech or the subtitles” (p. 13). In grammar lessons, teachers might color the grammatical points in the sentences to draw students' attention. While presenting the lesson, teachers should look at the camera when they are addressing students. In addition, teachers should give students enough time to answer questions or ask them to pause the video.

**3. Final stage:** this stage is the conclusion. Teachers can summarize the lesson; make a quiz or any kind of assessment to help students test their understanding of the lesson. At the end of video teachers might put music to leave students with good feelings about the video. In addition, they should write acknowledgement of anyone who help to make this video. Teachers also can write contact information about their organization, school or university such as the website and the email.

To upload the video to the *YouTube* website, teachers should write the title that reflects the content of the lesson. If the teacher has different playlists, the video should go under the appropriate list. For example, if a video about a grammar lesson, it should go under the grammar playlist. The next step is writing the video tags, which are the keywords that search engines use to find the video. For example, if the lesson is about the English present tense, the tags that might be used are: English, present tense, ing, grammar, ESL, learn English. The more related tags to the video, the more opportunities that the video is going to be displayed in the search results. The tags should be relevant to the content of the video. For example, a video about English past simple regular verbs should not have the following tags: fun, comedy, entertainment, joke, Russell peters, Canadian etc. Another point is putting the video in the right category: Education. Even the lesson is funny and has some jokes, listing it under the comedy category will mislead target users. Language learning videos are logically aimed to teach not to entertain.

### **5. Limitations of *YouTube***

Educationalists mentioned two points about using *YouTube* in education. The first one is that *YouTube* addresses visual and auditory learners as they can watch and listen. As Zimmerman (2010) states, “I can imagine using a *YouTube* video and students following directions for movement, incorporating the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, and so” (p. 189). In searching the *YouTube* website, we find different teachers use *YouTube* for kinesthetic intelligence. For example, Professor Acton, researcher who spends years incorporating the bodily intelligence to improve students’ pronunciation, uses *YouTube* to help students to improve their pronunciation in their preparation for TOEFL (see, for instance, *TOEFL iBT Speaking Warm-up* at TOEFL® TV - The Official TOEFL Channel on *YouTube*, <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=3jokYm2eemA>). This video receives more positive reactions from language *YouTube* learners.

Another point is the control of the comments and the viewers of the *YouTube*. People think that *YouTube* has less privacy. However, many features of *YouTube* give instructors control over who will watch their videos and what comments appear under their videos too.

Tracking the *YouTube* statistics shows that this website grows significantly in the cyberspace. In addition, the website shows concern about the problems that teachers have about using the *YouTube* in their classrooms. The instructors in the United States complain about the access of the website in their schools. Some US schools have blocked the *YouTube* website because students might use it for non-educational purposes. Therefore, *YouTube* has launched a new version of the portal called 'YouTube For Schools' to make the website available in every school in the United States.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has shed some light on one of the most used social media tools to teach and learn languages. The paper discusses some aspects that language teachers should be aware of while creating new *YouTube* LLVs. These different aspects come from the current language learning and teaching literature. So, the paper tries to fill in a gap where the language teachers might find it difficult to measure the effectiveness of their *YouTube* LLVs by providing a novel rubric. However, language teachers should bear in mind their own contexts and target audience when it comes to include images and topics that might create conflict in other cultures.

Future research in the use of *YouTube* LLVs is necessary, especially to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of *YouTube* LLVs, difficulties that language students have found while learning new languages through *YouTube* or teachers' experiences in using *YouTube* LLVs. These different topics will help researchers to optimize the use of *YouTube* in language learning and teaching.

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Appendix: The complete Guideline

**A- Video Characteristics:**

- 1) What is the quality of the images? Low quality, high quality?  
.....
- 2) What is the quality of the video? Low, medium, high quality?  
.....
- 3) What is the quality of the audio such as the narration and the background music?  
.....

- 4) When was the video uploaded?  
.....
- 5) How long is the video?  
.....
- 6) Does the video contain relevant tags?  
.....
- 7) Is the video categorized in the right category i.e. Education?  
.....

**B- Attractiveness:**

- 1) Do the first seconds or minutes of the video gain the *YouTubers*' attention?  
.....
- 2) Does the teacher have a good eye contact by looking at the camera?  
.....
- 3) Does the video contain relevant music at the beginning or as background?  
.....
- 4) Does the thumbnail of the video attract *YouTubers*?  
.....
- 5) Does the teacher show enthusiasm about the lesson video?

**C- Clarity:**

- 1) Does the teacher seem to be prepared?  
.....
- 2) Does the teacher use good body language to deliver the information?  
.....
- 3) Does the video depend on other videos? Or it can stand alone?  
.....
- 4) Does the video contain subtitles or captions?  
.....
- 5) Does the subtitle contain different colors?  
.....
- 6) Does the teacher use other tangible materials such as pens, signs, rulers, to teach?  
.....
- 7) Is the pace fast, slow, medium?  
.....

**D- Reaction:**

- 1) How do the *YouTubers* react through the comments?  
.....
- 2) Does the teacher respond to the students' comments?  
.....

- 3) Are any of the comments deleted?  
.....
- 4) Are there any unrelated comments?  
.....
- 5) How many people like the video?  
.....
- 6) How many people dislike the video?  
.....
- 7) How many times has the video been watched?  
.....
- 8) How many *YouTubers* have chosen the video as one of their favorite videos?  
.....
- 9) In which part of the world more people have watched the video?  
.....
- 10) Is the video embedded on other websites?  
.....
- 11) What age is the video popular with?  
.....
- 12) What gender is the video popular with?  
.....
- 13) How do people find the video?  
.....
- 14) Does the video have honors from *YouTube*? most viewed, most favorite, highest rated?  
.....

**E-Content:**

- 1) Does the teacher give an acceptable time for the *YouTubers* to answer the questions?  
.....
- 2) Does the video contain several steps? Introduction, main stage, conclusion?  
.....
- 3) Are the objectives of the video stated clearly?  
.....
- 4) Does the video contain unrelated contents such as commercial ads and personal stories?  
.....
- 5) Does the video contain culturally sensitive materials?  
.....
- 6) Does the video contain authentic exercises and examples of language use?  
.....

- 7) Does the title of the video reflect the content of the video? Or, on the contrary, does it mislead potential viewers?  
.....
- 8) Does the teacher use examples to clarify points?  
.....
- 9) Does the teacher repeat the important words, grammar points and questions?  
.....
- 10) Does the teacher define difficult terms or words?  
.....
- 11) Does the teacher summarize the video lesson?  
.....

Thank You!