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# Youtube for Foreign Languages: You Have to See This Video

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## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

# YOUTUBE FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES: YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS VIDEO

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## INTRODUCTION

“Have you seen this video?”

“You *have* to see this video.”

For the students belonging to the *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001), these phrases are used frequently to express their enthusiasm and overwhelming interest in new and fascinating videos that they have found via the Internet. These commonplace phrases also demonstrate their genuine desire to share and discuss what they have found.

Inspired by Chinnery’s (2008) column in which he describes Google-Assisted Language Learning, this column aims to accomplish a similar feat with regard to YouTube. The descriptions offered here are geared towards integrating the practice of creating, watching, and sharing YouTube videos, which appeals to the current generation of students, into foreign language teaching and learning. To accomplish this, there is a description of the brief history of YouTube and its impact on society, and of the defining characteristics of the digital natives and their unique educational needs. This is followed by an explanation of how YouTube can be used to bridge the gap between satisfying the particular educational needs of the students and meeting the demands of foreign language education.

## THE HISTORY OF YOUTUBE

In February of 2005, Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim founded YouTube with the domain name <http://www.youtube.com>. The site was created as a forum for people to create and share short video clips online. One year later Google purchased YouTube for \$1.65 billion. How popular is YouTube now? Consider that on a daily basis there are more than two billion views (YouTube Facts & Figures). In addition, 51 percent of YouTube viewers go to YouTube weekly, and 52 percent of 18 to 34 year-olds often share videos with other people (YouTube Fact Sheet).

Solomon and Schrum (2007) describe “The World’s First Web Band” as a microcosm for the impact YouTube has had on society as a whole. Consider that the members of this Web band never met each other in person, created a music video, and recruited a drummer completely online. Initially, they did not even know each other’s names. To date there have been over 2 million views of their first YouTube video, *Internet Killed the Video Star*. In closing, Solomon and Schrum ask the question also posed by this article, “what does this mean for education?”

Obviously, YouTube is used for varying purposes, the majority of which are not educationally relevant. For example, many people use YouTube simply as a form of entertainment. Someone records a person in a funny prank, posts it to YouTube, and others go to check it out. In some cases there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of viewers. For other users YouTube is a venue for sharing family videos, posting a work demonstration, advertising a company or product, or providing students access to media from across the globe. It is this educational value of YouTube that will be explored here with particular emphasis on foreign language education.

## ABOUT THE DIGITAL NATIVES

Who are the Digital Natives? In 2001, Marc Prensky coined the term *digital native* to refer to a person who has grown up with digital technology. These digital natives have habits and interests that are drastically different from those of previous generations. With the advent of the Internet and digital technologies, what were once considered normal daily activities are now replaced by video games, socializing on the net, and text messaging. Consider that 93 percent of the teenagers in the United States go online, 73 percent of these teens use social networking Web sites, and 75 percent have a cell phone (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). As these authors state, “The internet is a central and indispensable element in the lives of American teens and young adults.” (p. 5).

With these societal patterns in mind, there is a need to modify instructional methods and activities to take advantage of the unique interests of these students. What do the digital natives want? Much of what they want educationally relates to their growing interest in and use of Web-based technologies. Prensky (2001) presents the following list of digital natives’ wants for education:

1. To receive information at twitch speed
2. To be able to multi-task
3. To have hands-on activities
4. To have graphics before text
5. To have random access to information
6. To be networked socially
7. To play games rather than do serious work
8. To have frequent rewards

The problem with meeting these educational needs is the disconnect between what the digital natives want and what many teachers are able to provide. The remainder of this article will describe how utilizing YouTube videos for foreign language instruction may aid in bridging this gap.

## BRIDGING THE GAP WITH YOUTUBE

After considering the basic premise behind YouTube and the specific needs of the digital native students, the next logical question is: can the use of YouTube videos in the foreign language classroom satisfy students and teachers?

The answer is yes. YouTube offers fast and fun access to language and culture-based videos and instruction from all over the globe. It provides an outlet for student and teacher-created videos, and most importantly, YouTube videos provide students with an opportunity to engage meaningfully in the target language.

From a research perspective, there are several advantages to using video clips educationally. Berk (2009) describes a review of theoretical and research-based studies related to the use of videos and the brain. He discusses how the use of videos has been found to benefit students by connecting to multiple intelligences, both hemispheres of the brain, and to the emotional sense of the students. He also refers to the “picture superiority effect”, which explains that concepts or ideas are more likely to be remembered if they are presented as pictures rather than words.

From a practical perspective, the idea of utilizing YouTube in language classes is similar to what Randy Pausch refers to as the “head fake” (*Last Lecture*), in which a parent or educator shifts the focus of an activity while simultaneously teaching the targeted content. The result for the students is learning without initially realizing that they were learning. The poignant part of this approach is that the students are more

likely to remember the lesson after the fact. Foreign language students may be temporarily distracted or entertained by a YouTube video clip, but they will gain real linguistic knowledge and skills at the same time.

## YOUTUBE FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Building on the brief history of YouTube, the needs of the digital natives, and the benefits of using video clips, the focus of this article will now shift towards presenting YouTube as an instructional tool for foreign languages. The following is an explanation of several general methods in which YouTube videos can be utilized.

### YouTube for Providing Content and Information

YouTube videos can serve many purposes for foreign languages; however, the majority of uploaded videos are used to provide linguistic and cultural content and information in and related to the target language. Many of these videos are created by individuals or instructional institutions. For example, consider a series of videos produced by Señor Mara to educate his high school students on the Spanish language, *Conjugations Back* and *Cry Me a Verb*. In these videos Señor Mara uses current hip hop songs with revised lyrics to demonstrate how to conjugate Spanish verbs. For those who teach foreign languages, these videos are a must see.

Utilizing YouTube videos in an informative manner is also beneficial for illustrating a concept, presenting an alternative viewpoint, stimulating a learning activity, and motivating the students (Berk, 2009). As such, these videos may be used for inspiring or motivating students to learn. Consider the video *Foreign Language Study Benefits*, which aims to encourage students to learn a foreign language by describing the potential benefits. Other videos may motivate the students by catching their attention, much like entertainment: *French Man Tries to Say Hamburger*, *Learn Another Language*, *German Coast Guard - Lost in Translation*, *Paris At Last - I Love Lucy*, *One Semester of Spanish - Love Song*. Each of these videos highlights the comedic value of language learning or linguistic misunderstandings.

### Videos for Less Commonly Taught Languages

Perhaps one of the most advantageous uses of YouTube videos for foreign language education is for less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) for which some of these videos provide access to spoken samples, instructional units, and reading and writing practice. They provide users around the world with access to linguistic information for a specific target language that may not be accessible otherwise. See Table 1 for an overview of videos that are available for Arabic, Hebrew, Korean, Swahili, and more. This table is not intended to be an all inclusive list for LCTL's. It is merely a sample of the types of videos that are available via YouTube.

### Culture-Based Videos

In addition to linguistic and motivational purposes, another foreign language use for YouTube videos is to deliver insights into or representations of cultural information. Such culture-based videos serve as valuable resources for content courses, which may focus on culture and civilization. For example, Table 2 provides a general overview of the types of culture-based videos that are available via YouTube. These videos allow language learners to experience portions of other cultures including artifacts, history, and politics without physically traveling to the target country. Again, the videos listed here offer only a glimpse of what is available.

Many of these culture-based videos are documentaries posted by individuals, or short clips excerpted from larger documentary projects funded by companies such as ABC, BBC, NBC, or National Geographic. Regardless of how the documentary was produced it is important to encourage foreign language students to view it objectively. Last, other videos on YouTube are excerpts from live recorded

performances. Consider the African music video *AFRICAN MUSIC - hiphop from Tanzania, Live in Denmark - Mzungu Kichaa (SWAHILI)* or the French play *L'ETRANGER de Albert Camus - Live Theatre (French Language)*, stemming from the literary work of Albert Camus.

Table 1. Overview of YouTube Videos for Less Commonly Taught Languages

Language	Video	Description
Arabic	<i>Learn Arabic Letters of the Alphabet, Alif Ba.tv</i>	Video clip from Alifba.tv site for teaching Arabic to children
Chinese	<i>Learn Chinese , Hobbies in Mandarin</i>	Creative instructional video for Chinese hobby vocabulary
Hebrew	<i>Learn Hebrew - Animals</i>	Picture-based video for Hebrew animal vocabulary
Japanese	<i>Learn Japanese - Learn to Introduce Yourself in Japanese!</i>	Instructional video for Japanese with focus on grammar and pronunciation
Korean	<i>Learn Korean - Learn How to Read and Write Hangul</i>	Instructional video for Korean-Hangul characters
Portuguese	<i>Learn Portuguese Language Phrases - Useful Expressions</i>	Text-based video for Portuguese expressions accompanied by music
Russian	<i>Learn Russian: Food (Russian vocabulary)</i>	Instructional video with a focus on pronunciation for Russian food vocabulary
Swahili	<i>Swahili - Learn the Greetings &amp; Intros</i>	Series of instructional videos for Swahili

Table 2. Overview of YouTube Videos for Cultural Information

Cultural Information	Videos	Description
Cultural Artifacts	<i>Travel Documentary - Journey to East Africa (Kenya)</i> <i>German culture</i>	Video clip of one man's travels through Kenya Pictorial look at Germany's culture and history
History	<i>The story of India - amazing BBC documentary series part (1 of 7)</i> <i>EGYPT - Mother of the World</i>	Documentary of India's history with a look at historical events Pictorial look at Egypt's culture and history
Politics	<i>ABC television interview with Hugo Chavez</i> <i>20/20 Fidel Castro interview - Barbara Walters [4of6]</i>	Video clip of Barbara Walter's interview with Hugo Chavez Video clip of Barbara Walter's interview with Fidel Castro
Popular Figures	<i>SIGMA - 淚奔 Running with Tears MV (English subs + Pinyin + Chinese)</i> <i>French bestselling author, in a New York state of mind</i>	Popular Chinese music video Video clip of brief interview with French author Marc Levy
Traditions	<i>Introduction to Manga</i> <i>La Tomatina - Spain</i>	Video focusing on Japanese Manga comics Documentary of Spain's annual tradition

### **YouTube for Student-Created Videos**

Beyond presenting information to students via videos, YouTube also gives them an opportunity to create their own presentations in the target language. By creating their own videos students can apply the target language to real-world situations, which can be easily recorded and posted to YouTube. In the following examples, the students play the role of the teacher to create instructional video lessons: [Learn French! - Lesson #1](#) and [French Podcast - Future Tense](#).

For foreign language students YouTube is a simple tool for creating and editing video clips that approximate a professionally-made presentation. By integrating student-created YouTube videos into the foreign language classroom, language educators are also fostering student creativity and freedom of expression, further encouraging them to utilize the target language.

### **YouTube for Collaboration**

In addition to allowing students to create and edit language-based video clips, YouTube videos provide an opportunity for multiple students to collaborate on a language-based project. For example, YouTube hosts many collaborative projects created by foreign language students. Several common themes are news projects, (See [Spanish Newscast](#) created by heritage speakers), and short skits in the target language, (See [German Skit](#)). These types of projects allow the students to work together to create a final linguistic product.

YouTube also provides a worldwide venue for the students to share their work. In this manner viewers can “like” or “dislike” the video. The site also allows others to respond to the videos by posting a text or video response. Thus, students can get real feedback. Last, students and teachers can also subscribe to certain channels maintained by individuals and companies from around the world to keep up with their videos. Consider the [Foreignlanguagehouse Channel](#).

### **CONCERNS**

Although YouTube as described here seems potentially beneficial, there are several concerns to consider. First and foremost, there are issues of privacy and safety with relation to posting student-created videos online. It is important to note that YouTube does provide several posting options. If privacy is an issue videos can be posted under the unlisted setting, which provides a specific site address that can only be accessed by those possessing the URL. Also, the private setting shares the video only with users who have been granted access to the video.

Another potential concern for student-created videos is ensuring the appropriateness of the videos created and posted online. For this purpose it is important to create a clear video policy and explicit instructions for the students to follow in the process of completing their video-based assignments. Last, in many school settings access to YouTube and other social networking sites is restricted. After putting specific policies and guidelines in place for such language-based video assignments, perhaps this policy should be reconsidered on a setting-by-setting basis.

Last, there is the potential problem of accessing the videos online. It is important to maintain a good Internet connection. Users may access the direct link for the video, search for the video by keywords, or embed the videos directly into another location using the embed codes provided when uploading the video. Even with a good Internet connection, it is still possible to experience volatility with regards to clip availability. With this in mind there are several tools that can be used to ensure that the clip is available when needed. Tools such as [Easy YouTube Video Downloader](#) and [Clip Extractor](#) may be downloaded and installed easily. These tools enable downloading and converting FLV YouTube video files to other file formats such as MP4, AVI, and MOV. In fact, there are even YouTube videos available for learning how to use these tools. See [Convert YouTube Video To MP4, FLV, 3GP To Put Onto Your iPod, Phone, Or Computer](#) and [How to convert YouTube videos to MP4, MP3, AVI, MOV, 3GP](#). Once the video files have

been downloaded and converted to a playable format, they are more portable and do not require an Internet connection.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of utilizing videos in the foreign language classroom is not novel by any means. However, the opportunity for student-created videos and social networking provided by YouTube presents a radical new approach to providing linguistic input and encouraging students to engage in the target language. Utilizing this approach to learning foreign languages concentrates on the defining characteristics of the digital natives for whom digital technologies and social networking have become commonplace and indispensable in their daily lives.

It is undeniable that foreign language teaching will remain a delicate balancing act; however, YouTube is a tool that can help tilt the scales in favor of teachers. Integrating the use of YouTube videos in foreign languages is a valuable resource for teachers and students. In addition, YouTube provides a powerful, social venue in which the potential reach is exponential (Prensky, 2009). Typically, foreign language teachers may share with their fellow teachers in the same school, possibly with others in the same district. By posting a useful video to YouTube there is unlimited access to instructional videos and the potential benefit across the globe is much higher. Consider *Conjugations Back*, nearly 300,000 views, *Internet Killed the Video Star*, more than 2 million views, and Randy Pausch's *Last Lecture*, over 12 million views worldwide.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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