

Making the Most of Video Sharing Websites: An Indonesian Scenario

Mokhamad Syaifudin(msyaifudin@gmail.com)
IAIN Sunan Ampel, Indonesia

Abstract

This paper explores the potential of video sharing websites as a source of authentic learning materials in the form of video clips. The context is Indonesian schools, a context in which very few teachers currently use video in the classroom. There are many reasons for this; among them, the scarcity of video materials, a lack of knowledge on how to use video for teaching, and even a lack of awareness that video can be used as a language learning tool. This paper seeks to address such issues by offering some suggestions on how to make use of video sharing websites, search for video clips, to save them, and, most importantly, how to use them in the classroom. The discussion is intended to be practical rather than theoretical, and hopefully, it will provide a pathway for those who wish to use video in the classroom.

Keywords: Indonesia, web video, resources, learning activity

Introduction

“Video materials provide abundant authentic samples and modeling of the target language that students can directly and easily imitate.” (Canning-Wilson, 2000). They also provide a non-linguistic reference for learners to enhance comprehension of the target language being learned. By watching videos, learners can see and hear the language they are learning in actual use in daily conversation. Also, videos, with their visual interest and the wide variety of topics they cover, seem to be attractive to learners. For these reasons, language teachers should seriously consider using videos as a language learning tool.

In Indonesia, where English is a compulsory subject in schools, the use of videos in the language classroom is still rare. There seem to be several reasons for this. Most schools have no video material collections, and teachers lack knowledge of how to use videos in the teaching-learning process. Although most schools now possess sufficient and suitable hardware, having been supplied with video and audio systems by the government, few teachers have even thought of using it for showing videos.

In this paper, we shall seek to address such issues. Specifically, we shall offer suggestions on how to use video sharing websites as a source of abundant audio and video language teaching materials. These sources are valuable since the materials they offer are free and they contain authentic samples of the target language.

The discussion will not take the form of a specific tutorial. Rather, it will provide a pathway of how we can make use of the available video resources on the Internet, how to prepare them for classroom use, and how to use them in the classroom.

We shall focus on video sharing websites and look at the most important points to consider when selecting them for teaching purposes. We shall go on to explain how to search for video clips and prepare them in the absence of an internet connection. To end with, we shall suggest some techniques for using videos in the classroom for teaching and learning activities.

What are Video Sharing Websites?

Video sharing websites (VSWs) are a relatively new but ever-growing phenomenon. Their attraction lies in the wide variety of movie genres they offer and the possibility of the personalization of content. The videos they present, many of them home-made, are contributed by people from all over the world, and so are likely to be culture-rich and authentic.

Recently video sharing websites have become increasingly feature-rich. There are VSWs that offer features such as personal collections, links to weblogs, and security filters. While each VSW offers unique features that may attract different users, there seems to be one feature they all have in common; no downloadable links.

Some famous VSWs, offering a vast range of topics, well-classified and easy to search, are Metacafe, YouTube, MSN, Video, Google Video, Daily Motion, and Blip TV. Among these the best known and most frequently visited is YouTube. Godwin-Jones (2007) calculates that every day, on YouTube alone, more than 65 thousand videos are uploaded and more than 100 million videos are viewed. Of course, these videos are not only in English. Nevertheless, if teachers visit YouTube, there is very little possibility that they will fail to find videos suitable for use in the classroom.

However, it is necessary to consider some guiding principles when selecting these videos, since there are undoubtedly some themes and scenes that may not be appropriate for language learning.

What to consider when selecting video materials

Selecting videos to be used in the classroom is relatively easy as long as we bear in mind certain criteria for using such materials in the classroom. The main points that should be considered when selecting video clips are cultural appropriateness, the students' needs, the class objectives, the length of the video clip, the availability of hardware, visual quality, and compatibility.

Cultural appropriateness

When we learn a language, indirectly we will also learn something about the culture of the native speakers of that language. This is partly because we need to be immersed in the way native speakers think when using the language, and partly because the lexis of the target language will reflect the culture in which it has developed.

This issue sometimes triggers controversy among educators in a society with a very different culture. As a result, it can be a hindrance to the acceptance of what we want to pass on to the students. In the Indonesian context, the choice of clips that can be used may be based on cultural values that avoid the following things: graphic violence, sexual scenes, taboo words, racial issues, and blasphemy or criticism of religion.

Students' needs

Richards (2001) points out that a sound educational program should be based on the analysis of learners' needs. Common sense tells us that the language students learn should be the language they need in the real world. Unfortunately, while students can often identify what they want to learn, few know precisely what they need. It is, therefore, one of the teachers' jobs to guide students to be able to differentiate between their learning wants and their learning needs.

In practical terms, considering students' needs may affect such issues as who chooses the video and what topics might be interesting. It might be best, whenever possible, to give learners options from which to choose, thereby involving them in the selection of materials. This tends to give them a sense of control and is likely to lead to motivation and perhaps greater learner autonomy.

However, once again it should be emphasized that teachers themselves should be careful to identify, and differentiate between, learners' needs and learners' wants, and should take the responsibility of guiding their students. Unless they do this, teachers run the risk of becoming nothing more than entertainers and will potentially fail to function as language educators.

Class Objectives

We do not want our presentation to be too entertaining and thus not make the students not focus on what they have to achieve. Video clips can be abundant sources of authentic materials. Yet, unfortunately not so many people realize how video can be adapted and used for different levels of students. A single video clip can be used to teach a different level of students and to teach different class objectives.

What needs to be considered carefully is how we can simplify tasks to meet the needs and the abilities of our students of different levels. A single clip, for example, can be adapted to teach low-level up to advanced-level students merely by choosing suitable tasks for each level. At the end of this paper, there will be samples that can be used to teach different levels of students to meet their needs.

Video Clip Length and Quality

A full-length video clip can be entertaining to watch but it can also cause students to lose focus on the learning points. If this happens, it may not help them too much in acquiring useful language. Similarly, poor picture and sound quality may induce boredom in our students. For these reasons, we need to consider very carefully the length and the quality of the clip so that students remain focused on the task of learning rather than the entertainment value of the video.

What, then, is the most appropriate length? This may vary depending on the aims of the lesson that we want to teach, but generally, experience has shown that a 5-7 minute clip tends to be most appropriate since it will not take too long for students' to watch and for teachers to review. Moreover, if a video clip is fairly short, it will be easier for the teacher and learners to focus on specific language points.

Availability of Hardware

By hardware, we refer to the equipment that is used to play the video clips. They can include the player, the recording media, the sound system, even the room acoustics. As in the schools of much of the developing world, in most Indonesian schools such hardware is not easily available or accessible and teachers may need to exercise their creativity to obtain it.

In many Indonesian schools, the most convenient way to use video clips is by recording them onto CDs and playing them by using a television set. This is because a television set is by far the most widely available hardware. However, there are few things to consider when we record video clips onto CDs. Those are the file format, the software to use to edit and record the video, and the quality of CDs as the medium for recording the video.

Language Lab

Frequently a language lab is used to deliver this multimedia content. Despite its cost, still very expensive, more and more schools are becoming able to provide this sophisticated facility, perceiving the potential of using for language teaching computers which stimulate more than one mode of learning. At the same time, it must be admitted that some schools provide this facility merely for showing off and to advertise themselves to prospective students.

Some advantages of using a language lab are as follows: it provides more individualized learning, it facilitates immediate response to students' learning, it can provide a more culture-rich experience because students can directly see the language in use in society, and it allows a focus on pronunciation (Harmer, 2001). Nowadays, the use of computers in the language lab may provide even more benefits since they enable greater interaction, provide immediate feedback and opportunities for convenient error correction, and of course facilitate self-correction since students can directly compare and analyze their performance (Ariew & Frommer, 1987).

The availability of language lab features should be considered carefully when choosing a video so that all the benefits of a language lab can be realized.

Video streaming quality and compatibility

These days more and more websites provide video streaming features. These features can have advantages and drawbacks for the language teacher. In some developing countries, including Indonesia, where the internet connection is still not reliable and available everywhere, playing streaming video may often be troublesome. The trouble may take one of the following forms:

- The video has been found on the internet but it cannot be brought into the classroom because of the absence of the Internet or the connection is so slow that it will take more time than expected to play.
- Because of the type of file compression the video and sound are rather poor in quality.
- Some video files require specific player/plugin to play and very often installing this plug-in/software takes a long time because of the time to download the plug-in or because of the administrator privilege issues that are usually found in most computers owned by schools or public institutions.

Where to get videos

Having considered all the above, it is time to think of how and where to obtain the videos. In most countries, people can easily find video clips in these resources: DVD movies, news, documentaries or TV recordings, self-made videos, course books, and the Internet (Video Sharing Websites)

DVD movies, TV recordings, self-made videos and course book videos

DVD movies on the market are abundant sources of video clips for use in the classroom for language teaching. Video features that provide a menu will greatly help teachers to locate which clips they want to play in the classroom easily. Also, teachers can make use of the timer that very often comes with DVD players. DVD movies are also equipped with subtitles, which can be very helpful for learners. These subtitles will be especially helpful if students want feedback during the learning process.

However, DVD movies are not cheap and sometimes difficult to index. Although certain software can help a teacher cut certain clips and indexes them. It is not easy sometimes to use such software and takes time which many teachers do not have.

Other resources such as news, documentaries, and TV recordings are great learning resources but very often they are not easy to prepare and it takes time to record them and then saves them. Self-made videos are often preferred because they can be tailor-made to the needs of the students. However, they are even more time-consuming to prepare.

Videos that accompany course books are designed in such a way as to meet set aims and they come with a pre-designed syllabus and thus give clear guidance to the user. An example of such a video is the one that accompanies the well-known New Headway textbooks. However, many if not all such videos are made especially for language instruction and thus not completely authentic. Also, such videos are usually expensive, often beyond the budget of schools in developing countries, and difficult to acquire.

Video sharing websites

For the last option, we turn to the Internet, Here, videos are often available for free on Video Sharing Websites such as YouTube, MetaCafe, Daily Motion, and others. These VSWs provide abundant video resources that can be used for language teaching and

learning purposes. Below are a few reasons why these VSWs are especially valuable sources of video materials.

Most of the video clips available there are free. Thus we can easily keep them or even distribute them. Secondly, they are indexed in such a way that people can easily search and sort videos based on name or category. In this way, this facility helps people save time in accessing appropriate videos to use in the classroom. Third, most video clips are authentic and thus contain real examples of the target language in the real world. Furthermore, the videos are contributed by people all around the world and thus the topics and the genre of the video can be rich and varied.

However, VSWs are not without drawbacks. Principally, it is not always easy for people to save the videos in their private storage for ease of use later. In most developing-world schools, where there is no Internet connection, this can seem a real problem.

The key question is: how to save these web videos?

How to Save Web Videos

To save web videos there are at least three common techniques:

- using the available web-based video downloader
- using dedicated video-downloader software such as MIRO, iTunes, Azureus, Video Downloader
- using browser plug-ins which are also software designed by a third party but it is then integrated into the browser such as in Mozilla Firefox and Opera.

Of these, the easiest to use is the web-based video downloader. It is as simple as copying the video URL and pasting it into the provided column, which is usually available on web-based video downloader sites. And among the best web-based downloader probably keepvid.com is the most reliable one for internet users in Indonesia.

Unlike the web video downloader (which needs no installation and can be used directly with just a browser available), dedicated downloader software usually requires installation (though some may not). If it does, then we have to make sure that we have the administrator privilege to install such software. These downloaders usually come with features such as a download manager, a built-in video player, a powerful video search engine that will search multiple sites and thus give users more convenient to choose what to download, and an interesting and comprehensible interface. Unfortunately, most of them are not free. Some free software that can be recommended is MIRO, Azureus, and iTunes.

Like the dedicated software, browser plug-ins also require installation and, of course, administrator privilege, unless the browsers are portable such as portable Firefox or portable Opera that should run directly from a USB flash drive without installation.

Once the video clips have been downloaded, it is time to think of what media we should use to display the video to the learners. At this point, we should consider what file formats are playable in all kinds of media.

Media to display videos

How we present the videos to students will depend on the purpose, the audience, the storage media, and the file format of the video clips. The most common practice is for teachers to present a video to a group of students, and have the students do activities centered on the video being displayed. To do this, one of the following equipment options may be chosen.

An LCD projector.

These days LCD projectors are gradually becoming affordable for more and more schools. When using this equipment, teachers should know how to install it and be familiar with the room settings that will best accommodate its use. An LCD is very handy and effective for public display and can be connected either to a computer or to a DVD player directly. Some LCDs even support some multimedia card storage such as SD, MMC, or memory stick cards. While it is certainly true that teachers need to learn how to use them appropriately, this does not take long.

Computer and TV

If an LCD projector is too expensive, another alternative is to connect a computer directly to a television set. Even in developing countries like Indonesia, television can be found in almost every house and school and so will not be difficult to provide. However, to connect a computer to the TV, a computer must have an s-video port which unfortunately not every computer has.

iPod and other portable media players to TV

More and more people prefer playing multimedia files using a portable media player such as an iPod. This is due to the greater capacity, which may store hundreds of audio and video files. Also, the ability to play a vast range of different file formats makes these relatively small gadgets the primary choice of people who love the portability.

Wired and Wireless LAN (local area network)

Video can be broadcast over a local area network, either through a wired LAN, such as in a multimedia language lab or through a wireless local area network, where learners can access it through a portable device such as a portable computer or a personal digital assistant (PDA) with a wireless receiver module. This may be a good alternative when we desire a more personalized learning mode. However, in developing countries, such devices can be expensive, even though gradually more and more people are finding they can afford them.

DVD player and TV

Perhaps the most effective and realistic way to play video clips in the classroom for language instruction is the simple combination of the DVD player and television set. This

is because, due to their affordable price, both are easy to acquire even in the developing world.

How to use video in the classroom for language learning activities

Once video clips have been collected, we need to decide how to use them in the classroom. Teachers can choose from many techniques for teaching language using video, but failing to recognize which technique is appropriate may result in the unsuccessful achievement of a lesson aim. The following are some common techniques that can be adopted when teachers use video clips for language instruction.

1. Predicting the content

In this technique, teachers play a video clip and use the pause button to stop the action at selected points. Students are asked to guess what happens next.

2. Clips without sound

For lower-level learners, this technique can be used to review vocabularies, such as signs, adjectives, occupations, buildings, and many others. For Intermediate learners, such tasks as imagining what is being said, or dialogue-making based on the scene being played is suitable. These are rewarding activities since they promote the personalisation of content and creative use of language. In a similar activity, learners can be asked to provide a running commentary while they watch a clip without sound. Students narrate what they see just like a football match commentator. This activity may be suitable for more advanced learners.

3. Sound Only-What's going on?

In this activity, with the screen blank, learners can be asked to listen carefully and identify the sounds they hear, and then discuss and predict what is happening in the video clip. Naturally, this technique results in listening practice, but it also affords useful speaking opportunities.

4. Freeze frame

This technique encourages question and answer activities. A teacher plays a clip and stops at certain points and asks learners such questions as: 'what is he wearing?', 'what color is the car?', 'what is going to happen next?' After that, students can be instructed to ask and answer questions in pairs.

5. Viewing backward

In this activity, a video clip is played backward. At certain points, the teacher asks a question such as, 'what do you think happened before this?', 'who do you think did this thing', 'where do you think he is coming from'. This technique is similar

to the one we have seen, predicting the content of the clip, but in this case, learners are presented with a greater challenge. Also, the slightly bizarre effect can be attractive and motivating to students,

6. Eyewitness

Group the students into two teams. Group A wait outside the classroom while Group B watch a video clip. Group A then acts as policemen looking for facts by asking structured questions and finally they guess what was happening in the clip. This activity mimics the actions of police and eyewitness in the real world.

Undoubtedly other activities can be used with video. One way to find and share such techniques is by subscribing to language teaching groups available in many e-group providers such as Google Groups and Yahoo Groups.

From the teacher's point of view, the most important thing is to consider carefully what technique is appropriate to a particular learning point or skill. The aim of the lesson should determine the selection of activity, rather than vice versa. As long as the teacher keeps this in mind, learners can derive great benefit from a wide range of video activities.

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