

Images

7

Jamie Keddie provides a panoramic view of the potential of YouTube.

'I very much hope that this new medium will make my Christmas message more personal and direct.'

These were the first words of Queen Elizabeth's first televised Christmas message in 1957. Exactly 50 years later, she could have repeated them verbatim as she took a bold step into cyberspace and launched her own channel on YouTube.

Within a week of being uploaded onto the video-sharing website, the Queen's 2007 Christmas message had been viewed over 700,000 times. Could Her Majesty be on the way to joining the ranks of more established YouTube celebrities such as Ahree Lee (see image below), geriatric1927 (YouTube's oldest videoblogger) or even Spudgy the dog?

Short on history

At the time of writing, www.YouTube.com is ranked as the fourth most popular site on the internet. Its history is simple: it was set up in 2005 by three men in their twenties (Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim); it was bought by Google Inc in November, 2006 for \$1.65 billion; and it hasn't been out of the news since.

In the whole of last year, *YouTube*, as a word, failed to make an appearance in only 11 issues of *The Guardian* (a quality British daily newspaper). In some cases, journalists will have been writing about specific content – sports clips or news footage, for example. In other cases, it was the website itself that was making the news. Here are 18 sample headlines, in no particular order, from various issues of *The Guardian* in 2007:

- ◆ Battle over YouTube clip of schizophrenic boy being bullied
- ◆ Alonso has his say as YouTube video threatens Hamilton's title hopes
- ◆ Prince takes on YouTube
- ◆ First ads appear on YouTube
- ◆ Priest's racist rant posted on YouTube
- ◆ Teachers call for YouTube ban over 'cyber-bullying'
- ◆ Clinton and Obama clash after YouTube debate
- ◆ YouTube prompts revolution in televised debates
- ◆ YouTube launches nine national sites and targets every mobile
- ◆ US troops in Iraq get own YouTube channel
- ◆ 'Laborvision' fails to woo the YouTube generation
- ◆ YouTube ban after videos mock Thai king
- ◆ EMI strikes YouTube deal
- ◆ Beheading of Mexican 'drug dealer' on YouTube
- ◆ YouTube blasted over ban on cancer videos
- ◆ YouTube faces \$1bn lawsuit for alleged breach of copyright
- ◆ Why YouTube clips are good for television
- ◆ Biker could face prosecution over YouTube video
- ◆ Anger at YouTube stammer clips

As these headlines suggest, YouTube is currently influencing news, politics, law, music, the media and society in general.

Long on content

YouTube may be host to as many as 60 million video clips, the vast majority of which last no longer than ten minutes (this is actually a restriction imposed by YouTube itself to strengthen its policy against copyright infringement).

The recent popularity of video sharing has, to a large extent, come about as a result of the explosion of other accessible technologies, such as digital cameras and camcorders, including those on mobile phones. In conjunction with user-friendly video-editing software such as *Windows MovieMaker*, tools like these have provided many

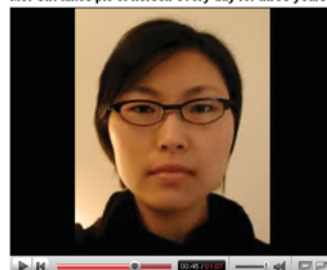
Me: Girl takes pic of herself every day for three years



Me: Girl takes pic of herself every day for three years



Me: Girl takes pic of herself every day for three years



Three scenes from Ahree Lee's digital video portrait entitled: *Me: Girl takes pic of herself every day for three years*

Images



with the opportunity to turn their hand to filming, creating, producing, directing, acting, broadcasting and videoblogging. YouTube is the biggest stage for talent or commentary the world has ever seen. And with the recent awakening of politicians and big business to the importance and potential of the new medium, the diversity of videos on YouTube is higher than ever.

Of course, there is an absolutely huge amount of inane content and this can potentially give the website a bad press. But for the language teacher, it is also an inexhaustible source of excellent multicultural material for the classroom.

Here, I would like to share some clips that I have found to be useful for teaching. The clips can be seen at www.YouTube.com by entering the titles (shown in italics) into the search window at the top of the screen.

Many of the following are *viral videos*. This term refers to any clip that has gained widespread popularity through video sharing, emailing, myspacing, facebooking, IM messaging, blogging, etc.

1 Caught on camera (amateur film clips, CCTV, etc)

- *Battle at Kruger* (a famous amateur-filmed natural history clip)
- *Plane crashes into water pilot ejects* (This happened right in front of a crowd of beach bathers.)
- *Very large hail*
- *Racism in metro of Barcelona* (This was an important news story in the city where I work: a man was caught on camera kicking a young Ecuadorian girl.)
- *University of Florida student tasered at Kerry forum* (As a result of the notoriety of this disconcerting clip, the *Yale Book of Quotations* chose student Andrew Meyer's plea, 'Don't tase me bro', as being the most memorable quote of 2007.)

2 Cute animals and babies

- *Sleepy Spudgy* (a clip of a dog struggling to stay awake)
- *Hahaha* (a famous laughing baby)
- *Sneezing panda*
- *How to feed 100 dogs at once*
- *Otters holding hands* (a very popular clip of sea otters)
- *Otters holding hands – CBC news* (a TV report on the above clip)

3 Music videos

In August 2006, YouTube announced its plan to offer, within 18 months, every single music video ever made. I don't know if such a dream can ever be made possible, but there is no music video that I have been unable to find on the site so far.

A number of music videos have become viral videos, and this has resulted in success for those behind them. The US band *OK Go* is probably the best example of such a group.

- *OK Go – Here It Goes Again*

4 Short films, art, dance and other projects

- *Me: Girl takes pic of herself every day for three years* (See photo on page 29.)
- *Where the hell is Matt?* (Video game developer Matt Harding's film shows him doing a funny dance in 15 different countries.)
- *Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?* (See photo on page 31.)
- *Free hugs campaign* (Juna Mann, the Australian behind this, is currently trying to use YouTube success to promote an annual International Free Hugs Day.)
- *Kiwi!* (a three-minute animated film by New York arts student Dony Permedi, which has gained YouTube fame)
- *'Thriller' (original upload)* (a hugely popular viral video in which over 1,500 inmates of the Cebu detention centre in the Philippines re-enact the choreography from Michael Jackson's *Thriller*)

5 Adverts

Many advertisers, inspired by the phenomenon of viral videos, have turned to viral advertising. Any advert that is successful on YouTube will

necessarily be entertaining, artistic or appealing in some way or another. Sometimes the appeal is that they have been deemed too risqué for TV. Some even *advertise* that they have been banned by television authorities, in an attempt to rouse interest. Here are a few examples of adverts that are doing considerably well on this new medium:

- *Use condoms*
- *Mr W* (a very clever advert, but I'll spoil it for you if I say what it is for)
- *Dove evolution* (an excellent advert that is part of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty)
- *Gorilla advert* (This viral advert did much to reverse the image decline that Cadbury's chocolate experienced in the first half of 2007 as a result of a product recall crisis.)
- *Berlitz German commercial* (Students of English seem to like this advert in which a young German coastguard is unable to avert disaster, as a result of a particular 'minimal pair' problem.)

Note: The chances are high that any good advert that your students like will be on YouTube.

6 Clips from films and TV shows

YouTube is host to an enormous amount of clips. Many of them will have been uploaded illegally and don't stay on the site for long. Here are a few that are particularly relevant to language learners and teachers:

- *Monty Python dirty Hungarian phrase book* (the sketch that gave rise to the phrase 'My hovercraft is full of eels')
- *Do you speak English?* (a sketch from the British comedy series *Big Train*, that students usually like)
- *Weird Japanese video* (a Japanese TV show that teaches English via very bizarre aerobics – absolutely essential viewing)
- *Speaking whale* (In this scene from *Finding Nemo*, Dory attempts to speak 'whale'.)

7 Famous pieces of news and sports footage

- *Lee Oswald shot* (Dallas, 1963)
- *¿Por qué no te callas?* (a famous clip from 2007 in which the King of Spain rebukes the President of Venezuela)

- *Tank man* (Beijing, 1989)
- *Muhammad Ali vs George Foreman* (the 'Rumble in the jungle')

8 Bloopers and outtakes (things that go wrong)

- *Free President Bush* (The US president makes an unsuccessful attempt to escape from a press conference.)
- *But ... he's gay* (a strange mistake from a news presenter)
- *Pinky the cat* (A 'pet of the week' slot doesn't go according to plan.)
- *BBC news blunder – Guy Goma* (a very funny clip – A man goes to the BBC for a job interview and, as a result of a mix-up, ends up being interviewed live on air about a subject not of his choice.)

YouTube in the classroom

I have tried to offer as wide a range of multicultural YouTube clips as possible, but, inevitably, many of these will be rooted in Western media and culture. YouTube is an international medium and we can use it to find videos that are relevant to our learners' backgrounds, cultures and tastes. The most engaging lessons will be the ones that we plan around the clips that students connect with or actually choose themselves.

I would always prefer to have a single computer in the classroom rather than a designated computer room somewhere else in the school. In this way, I have constant access to this invaluable resource, as well as others, such as image search engines.

With large classes, the ideal equipment would be a computer, a projector and a screen, but most of us aren't so lucky. Getting my students to gather around a single computer screen (desktop or laptop) has always worked very well for me.

If you have a computer but no internet access and you want to show YouTube clips, there are ways around this problem. Some of these are discussed at www.teflclips.com.

So, how can YouTube be used in the classroom? YouTube is an enormous and important resource, and there isn't space in this article to describe in detail the huge range of possibilities for using it in class. In fact, the answer to the above question really encompasses answers to all of the following:



A great example of a collaborative class project: teacher Riley Ray and his Korean students made a short film (*Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?*) to upload on YouTube.

- How can you use image in the classroom?
- How can you use film in the classroom?
- How can you use art in the classroom?
- How can you use technology in the classroom?
- How can you use music in the classroom?
- How can you use and approach news and current affairs in the classroom?
- How should we approach the subject of the media in the classroom?

Perhaps there are three ways to look at things:

1 YouTube is an invaluable source of material.

YouTube has everything, and I can't think of a better reason for having technology in the classroom.

As I have mentioned, many of the clips listed in this article are viral videos and a great deal has been written about them online, much of which can serve as complementary classroom material. Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), the free online encyclopedia, is a good starting point. Here are a few Wikipedia entries relevant to the examples given in this article:

- Battle at Kruger
- University of Florida taser incident
- Matt Harding (the man behind the *Where the hell is Matt?* video)
- Free hugs campaign
- Thriller (Cebu, Philippines inmates' video)
- Kiwi!

- Evolution (Dove)
- Gorilla (Cadbury)
- ¿Por qué no te callas?


2 YouTube provides a good reason for a collaborative class film-making project.

A video doesn't, of course, have to be made as professionally as Riley Ray's *Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?*

3 YouTube as a phenomenon makes a good subject for discussion and investigation.

There is a lot of scope here. The mass media is an important subject for every educator, and video sharing may be the most recent powerful player.

www.teflclips.com

The primary aim of this article has been to examine the potential of YouTube as a valuable resource of material for the language teacher, rather than to offer any specific ways in which it could be used in the classroom. For free lesson plans based on YouTube clips, including many of those which have been discussed, visit www.teflclips.com. 



Jamie Keddie is a writer and English teacher based in Barcelona.

jamiekeddie@hotmail.com