Broadcast Yourself: YouTube as a Tool for Interpreter Education

Tom R. Cox
San Antonio College, tcox@alamo.edu

Cox

Broadcast Yourself: YouTube as a Tool for Interpreter Education

Tom R. Cox[1]

San Antonio College

Abstract

YouTube is a website designed for the purpose of easily sharing videos and is extremely popular with today's generation of "digital native" students. The technology is easily accessible, free, and relatively simple to use. However, its merits as an educational tool for interpreting seem to be widely underutilized even though it is ideally suited for working with a visual language. In the fall of 2009, I began experimenting with YouTube in my American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting classes. I have slowly incorporated many of YouTube's useful features in my curriculum, enhancing my ability to provide pre-assignment information, interpreting models, and feedback on student work. So far, the response from students has been very favorable. I hope that sharing my strategies for using YouTube in the classroom will lead to collaboration with my colleagues and further exploration of YouTube as an effective tool in interpreter education.

Keywords: interpreter education, YouTube, sign language, ASL, video instruction, technology

---

[1] *Correspondence to: tcox@alamo.edu*

92

Broadcast Yourself: YouTube as a Tool for Interpreter Education

1.   Introduction

I am an associate professor in the Department of American Sign Language (ASL) and Interpreter Training (IT) at San Antonio College, in San Antonio, Texas. This semester, I am teaching four sections of Interpreting I, the introductory interpreting class after students have completed four semesters of ASL instruction. I have been in my current faculty position since 2001, and although there are many things I like about teaching interpreting, I have never been completely satisfied with the traditional methods of instruction or of giving feedback to students pertaining to their ASL-to-English or English-to-ASL interpreting. A traditional way to provide feedback is to do it in real time, meeting with the student and having both of us review the work together. Alternately, I could grade a student's work by watching or listening to the student's recorded performance and taking notes on his or her strengths and weaknesses. Then, I would arrange to sit with the student and discuss the particulars of the performance, or I would provide the student with written comments to compare with the recorded work. Meeting with each of my students for each assignment takes a substantial amount of time. If I just give them my written feedback, students may or may not watch their work while reviewing my comments. Even if they do watch the work and review my comments, there is no guarantee that they will be able to synchronize my feedback with the respective segment of their work. These traditional methods of giving feedback are both time consuming and inefficient and, consequently, left me wanting a better option. Discovering the annotation features built in to YouTube provided me with that better option.

A few semesters ago I stumbled upon something that has had a significant impact on how I provide instruction and feedback to my students. In this article I discuss my use of YouTube in my interpreting classes. Specifically, I explain how this free service has dramatically improved what I am able to do in terms of providing direct, clear feedback to my students. To help demonstrate exactly what I do with YouTube in my classroom, I have created a series of companion YouTube videos as models. These samples are referenced during the corresponding sections of the article with the URL, which link the reader directly to the YouTube video.

2.   Getting Started

At the beginning of each semester I ask all of my students to establish their own YouTube accounts. Many students come into my class already familiar with YouTube and have their own accounts. For those who are not familiar, opening a new user account is simple and free and involves only a few steps. I keep a list of students' YouTube user names in my grade book so that I am able to contact them with their assignment feedback. For this article, I will not go into specific details about the technical side of using YouTube; there are plenty of other resources already developed for this purpose. Instead, I will provide information on how I use YouTube as a tool in my classroom. (See Appendix for information on how to find resources for using YouTube.)

Cox

3.   YouTube Video Privacy Settings

YouTube allows users to upload videos filmed in a variety of formats. Uploading videos to YouTube is a simple process (resources within the YouTube site can help with this). You can choose to assign to your uploaded video one of three levels of security. In this section, I explain each of the security levels and how I use them in my work with my students.

Public. This is the least secure method of uploading videos. When you upload your video to YouTube, you are asked to provide key words called "tags." For videos for my class, I might choose to include tags like "English to ASL," "sign language," "interpreting resources," etc. These tags serve as identifiers or search terms that allow anyone with access to the Internet to search YouTube for videos that might contain these tags. I upload videos as public if I am willing to share them with anyone with access to the Internet. I might choose to do this with samples of my own work that I want to make accessible. I also may choose to upload spoken English recordings that I make for my students to use as source material.

Unlisted. This is a medium level of security for uploading videos. Only people with the specific URL can actually navigate to an unlisted video; these videos will not show up on any of the areas on YouTube accessible to the general public. Once I have uploaded videos that I want my students to have access to, I simply send an email including the link or I post the link on the course page that the college provides for each section of classes being taught. (San Antonio College uses Blackboard or Alamo Colleges Educational Services [ACES]; other colleges may have different ways of electronically connecting students and professors.) If I decide to restrict access to the video at a later date, I can always update the Broadcasting and Sharing Options and designate the video as private.

Private. This is the most secure method for uploading videos. When I upload videos of my students' work for grading and feedback, I always use this method. This means that the work is inaccessible to the general public; it cannot be searched for and located using the tags associated with the video like in the public option above. Videos that are designated as private may be shared with up to 50 users only. When I am ready to make the graded video available to the student, I simply "share" the video with the student using the Broadcasting and Sharing Options tab and enter the student's user ID. The student then receives an email from YouTube that I have "shared" a video; this notification directs the student to the uploaded video on my YouTube channel, where he or she can view the video with my comments.

4.   Scaffolding and Advance Organizers: Pre-Assignment Information

In a recent article summarizing research on scaffolding, van de Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen (2010) define *scaffolding* as "support given by a teacher to a student when performing a task that the student might otherwise not be able to accomplish" (p. 274). I routinely use YouTube to provide my students with scaffolding in the form of pre-assignment information such as background information and extra vocabulary they might need. These online "advance organizers" prepare students for the task of interpreting unfamiliar source material in several ways.

First, students use the contextual information provided in the advance organizer to develop schema or some way to relate the information to their own prior knowledge of the subject. I encourage students to do further research exploring additional themes that are likely to occur based on the information provided. As an interpreting instructor, I remind my students of the importance of continually developing their extra-linguistic knowledge, an essential component in comprehension (Gile, 2009).

Students also use the contextual information to assist in their "meaning making" when simultaneously interpreting cold material. Context plays a significant role in our ability to deduce meaning from discourse. Unfortunately, the process of teaching interpreting can sometimes lead to an artificial isolation of the discourse, separating it entirely from context. The more contextualized I can make the discourse for my students, the greater their chances of fully understanding the source message.

94

Broadcast Yourself

Finally, when students are given the technical vocabulary necessary to provide an accurate interpretation into their second language, more of their cognitive resources can be spent on the interpreting process itself. Having the vocabulary they need in advance of an assignment helps to reduce their cognitive load during the task. Lowering their risk of saturation helps them to experience a greater measure of success in the interpretation than they might otherwise experience (Gile, 2009).

Here is how a typical exercise unfolds. I assign the monologue "Betty Cox—International Student Scholarship." It is a spoken English monologue of about 3 minutes in length describing an international student scholarship at a community college, created in honor of Betty Cox for her 80th birthday. After I share this information with the students, I direct them to discuss what they already know about the topic and what they can reasonably assume might come up during the assignment. We do this collaboratively so that the class can benefit from schema some students may already have. If students do not seem to have much schema or seem to be off the topic, I gently guide them in a more productive direction. Depending on the assignment, the task might be continued as homework, with students encouraged to explore on their own outside of class.

Next, I have the students watch the pre-assignment video posted on YouTube that gives them background information and specific vocabulary that I know they will need but suspect they may not have. This link will direct you to the YouTube video of the pre-assignment information that my students see prior to attempting the "Betty Cox—International Student Scholarship" assignment in class:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmkTsjJlqEc

After students are comfortable with the vocabulary presented in the pre-assignment video, they film themselves interpreting the spoken English source material into sign language without rehearsal, or "cold."

5. Providing Feedback on Students' Work

After students record and save video samples of their work in class, I upload the videos to my YouTube channel as "private." I can then view the videos and add annotations, to give students direct feedback. (See Appendix for more information regarding resources on how to annotate YouTube videos.)

There are several ways I can add feedback using the various annotation types. I primarily use the speech bubble and the note features. For each of the annotations, I can specify the location on the video where the annotation will appear, the dimensions of the annotation, the font size and color of the text as well as the background color, the point during the video at which the annotation will appear, and how long it will remain visible. I especially like the speech bubble feature, because I can precisely locate the "pointer" to the exact area of the video that the comment applies to, as seen in Figure 1. For example, if I am providing feedback on a student's use of fingerspelling, I can orient the speech bubble so that it directly points to the fingerspelling.

Cox

Figure 1: Annotation using the pointer feature to highlight fingerspelling.

When I begin adding annotations to a student's assignment, I find it helpful to adjust the scale of the video timeline using the magnifying glass symbols with the plus and minus signs, as shown in Figure 2. Increasing the scale makes viewing and aligning multiple comments much easier.
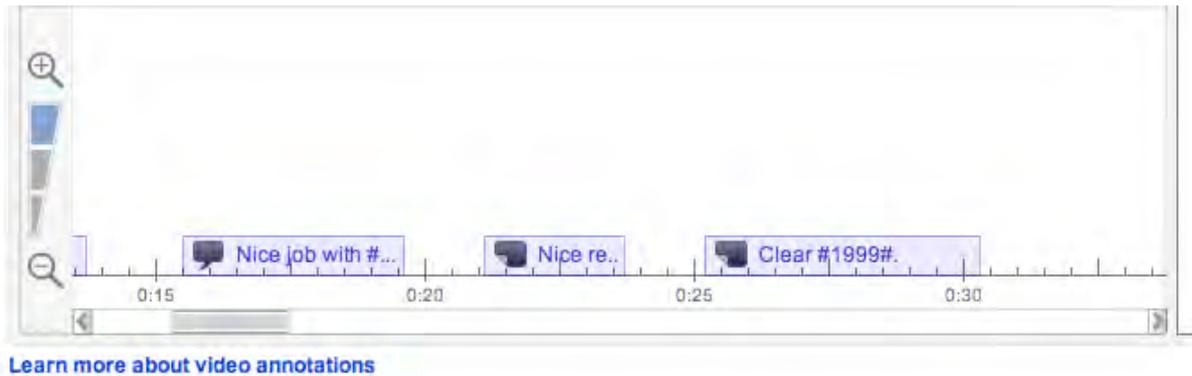

Figure 2: Adjusting the scale of the video timeline.

Once I have completed all the annotations to my student's work, I save and publish the annotations. I am now ready to share my feedback. To make the video accessible to this student, I simply "share" the video by using the Broadcasting and Sharing Options button on my YouTube window and enter the student's user name, as illustrated in Figure 3. From this screen I can also add a message to the student.

Figure 3: Broadcasting and Sharing Options.

Broadcast Yourself

For an example of a student video that has been annotated for demonstration purposes for this article, go to the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=An3bvfGixdI

Students can also use the annotation feature to annotate a sample of their work or an instructor model uploaded to their own YouTube account, and then "share" the video with me. I can assign students the task of providing reflection on their own work or ask them to identify specific features within the signed model.

Within annotations, I can insert links to other locations on the Internet, for example, to refer students to samples in my video library that demonstrate effective methods for a skill students might have difficulty with. Suppose a student is struggling with a listing feature in the target message. I can add an annotation that points out how the listing feature was not as effective as it could be and then add a link. When the student clicks on this link, it automatically opens a video I have created that models several strategies for using listing in ASL.

Another effective use of the annotation/link feature is to direct students to source material I have found posted by other users on YouTube. When I find a sample of spoken discourse suitable for use as source material, I often make a model of the work and upload my interpretation of the source to my YouTube channel. At the beginning of my video, I add an annotation that includes a link to the original source. This allows students to navigate to the source material prior to viewing my model of the assignment. Of course, the link feature can be used to direct students anywhere on the Internet for an unlimited range of resources.

6. Student-Directed Video Logs of Sign Vocabulary

I have found it helpful to have my students create their own videos to upload to their respective YouTube channels. When we work with new source material, students typically generate lots of discussion about new sign vocabulary. Traditionally, students would write down in journals the new vocabulary they learned on a given assignment, and add to the sign vocabulary journal throughout the semester. However, it is not easy to describe the parameters of sign production in a written journal. This has an impact on the effectiveness of sign vocabulary journals and may diminish students' motivation for reviewing them. My solution is to have students create signed video logs periodically throughout the semester: After we conclude an assignment with a lengthy sign vocabulary discussion, students create a video log entry of the new vocabulary; in the video, the student models the sign production, explains the meaning(s) of the sign, and describes the context in which the sign may be used. Students then upload this video to their own YouTube channels. Now the new vocabulary is saved in a format that is much more useful and readily available anytime the students have an Internet connection—it is even viewable over their smart phones. For an example of a student-created video log, go to

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLO9qaWdOFg

7. Building a Database of Interpreting Models

For the last several semesters, I have been creating a video library of interpreting samples. Some of them are models of required assignments. For an example of an instructor model for "Betty Cox—International Student Scholarship," go to

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCuJ0n8eP3Y

Other videos in my YouTube library are brief samples of interpreter work that showcase specific interpreting skills. I am continually adding new video lessons demonstrating specific structures or features of ASL. Ideas for development include demonstrations of expansion techniques, effective use of space, role shifting, classifiers, various listing techniques, transitions, and so forth. I envision this library evolving into a collaborative collection

of samples available to any of my professional colleagues. These sample lessons could be listed as "public" and thus would be available to anyone who could benefit from the information.

A slightly different approach to using models of interpreted work on YouTube is to use the annotation feature to add comments throughout the model. This allows an instructor to, in effect, give a "play-by-play" breakdown of the work, highlighting specific features of the model for students to pay special attention to. These videos of interpreting models can then be made accessible simply by giving students the URLs.

8.   Conclusion

I have found many benefits of using YouTube in my classroom. I love the convenience of storing samples of work that I want my students to view. YouTube is readily accessible, free, and familiar to many of my students; when I use this medium in my interpreting classes, I am using technology that they are comfortable with. I am approaching them on their terms (Clifton & Mann, 2010), which goes a long way toward building a rapport with students that I might not have under other circumstances. Also, I can watch and grade student videos from anywhere that I have Internet access. This makes grading students' work so much easier than being tied to a particular workstation in my office or having to transport materials. Once students' work is loaded onto my YouTube channel on the Internet, I have it accessible to me virtually anywhere; I do not have to carry around flash drives, DVDs, or videotapes. And with smart-phone technology providing ready access to YouTube, students are able to watch their recorded work or interpreting models I have uploaded right in the palms of their hands. This accessibility alone makes me appreciate the technology.

YouTube could be an effective tool for many other purposes and across different disciplines; the techniques I am using with students in my classroom could be easily adapted to distance education and mentoring applications, for example. I believe spoken language interpreter educators would find many similar uses of YouTube to support their work with students. What I am doing with YouTube in my interpreting classes is likely only scratching the surface—YouTube's potential is limited only by our own creativity and ability to conceive of ways to use this wonderful medium.

9.   References

Clifton, A., & Mann, C. (2010). Can YouTube enhance student nurse learning? *Nurse Education Today*, *31*(4), 311–313.

Gile, D. (2009). Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training (Rev. ed.). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins North America.

van de Pol, J., Volman, M., & Beishuizen, J. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher-student interaction: A decade of research**.** *Educational Psychology Review, 22*(3), 271–296.

Broadcast Yourself

Appendix

YouTube Resources

Resources for Creating an Account, Uploading Videos, and Editing Videos in YouTube

1. Go to Google and type "YouTube Help" into the search string.
2. Select "YouTube Help."
3. Select the help topic that you are interested in using.

Resources for Annotation in YouTube

1. Go to Google and type "YouTube Help Creating or Editing Annotations" into the search string.
2. Select "Creating or editing annotations—YouTube Help."
3. Select the expandable subtopics you are interesting in using:
    a. Accessing the Annotations Editor
    b. Tour of the Annotations Editor
    c. Creating an Annotation
    d. Editing an Annotation
    e. Saving, Publishing, and Deleting Annotations

Just a few minutes spent reading through these sections will provide you with enough of the basics to be able to use annotations with your students' videos.