


Chapter 11

What Constitutes an Effective Instructional Video?

Perspectives From Chinese EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Online English courses have been developing rapidly in the past few years. As instructional videos play a central role in such courses, what constitutes an effective instruction video becomes a critical question for online English course developers. This chapter offers perspectives of EFL learners on this issue via content analysis of their feedback on existing instructional videos used in online English courses. The data consisted of 51 learners' comments on three micro-courses and 3,510 learner reviews on 41 English MOOCs. Analysis of the data revealed the most favorable features of an instructional video, the means to actualize these features, and learners' perceptions of different aspects of the physical design of an instructional video. The findings provided video producers with suggestions on the design and production of instructional videos used in online English courses.

INTRODUCTION

English micro-courses and MOOCs are gaining in popularity rapidly during the past few years.¹ Central to these online English courses are the instructional videos produced by course instructors.² First, instructional videos constitute an essential component of these courses which are organized either as a single instructional video or a sequence of instructional videos interspersed with other resources and learning activities (Educourse, 2012; Guo, Kim, & Rubin, 2014). Second, they serve as a predominant way of transmitting information and instructions to students (Khalil, Brunner, & Ebner, 2015). Third, online learners often paid most or even all of their attention to instructional videos (Breslow et al., 2013; Kizilcec, Piech, & Schneider, 2013). Finally, these instructional videos are also a source of authentic language input and an opportunity for learners to be engaged in language and culture (Sokolik, 2014).

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What Constitutes an Effective Instructional Video?

Due to the critical role of instructional videos, it is very important for developers of online English courses to design videos that cater for the needs and interests of EFL learners. However, direct feedback of EFL learners on these instructional videos has been rarely considered. To address the gap, the present study provided an explorative investigation of the perspectives of EFL learners on instructional videos. The findings are expected to provide video producers with suggestions on the design and production of instructional videos used in online English courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have examined the design and production of instructional videos used in online courses on subjects other than English. They presented a range of findings and suggestions concerning the physical design, content design, and structure of an instruction video.

Studies that investigated the physical design of a video mainly dealt with the presentation style, speaking rate, caption, length, navigation support and visual transition of a video.³ With respect to presentation style, the results indicated that talking-head style videos were slightly more popular and resulted in better learning performance than drawing-board style videos (Ilioudi, Giannakos, & Chorianopoulos, 2013); drawing-board style videos and PowerPoint-slide style videos enjoyed similar popularity (Cross, Bayyapuned, Cutrell, Agarwal, & Thies, 2013); lecturing videos interspersing PowerPoint slides with an instructor's talking head were more engaging than slides alone (Guo et al., 2014); and drawing-board style tutorial videos were more engaging than PowerPoint-slide ones (Guo et al., 2014).⁴ As for speaking rate, caption and length, it was shown that videos where instructors spoke fairly fast with high enthusiasm were more engaging (Guo et al., 2014); videos with captions resulted in better learning performance than those without captions (Wang, Hao, & Lu, 2014); and shorter videos, ideally less than six minutes, were much more engaging (Guo et al., 2014). Regarding navigation support and visual transition, it was suggested that navigation support all through the content should be provided (Chorianopoulos & Giannakos, 2013; Kim et al., 2014), while abrupt visual transitions should be avoided (Kim et al., 2014).

Several studies presented findings that were useful for designing the content of a video. Coccoli, Iacono, and Vercelli (2015) and Zhu, Pei, and Shang (2017) revealed that narrative-style videos with gamification design were more engaging than lecture-style videos. Swarts (2012) discovered that highly-rated tutorial videos spent more time doing and explaining steps than either doing or explaining alone and their instructional messages were easily identified, understood and applied.

A few studies offered suggestions concerning the structure of a video. Zheng, Wang, Wang, and Bai (2012) suggested that a MOOC video should typically include an opening, a question that captures the essence of the video, explanation of the question, revision, in-video quizzes and answers, announcement of the main content of the next video, and an ending. Kovacs (2016) concluded that in-video quizzes could be added to a video to improve learners' engagement with the video. Swarts (2012) advised presenting an outline of the lesson to be learned at the beginning of a video.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, there have been a few studies that investigated or touched upon instructional videos used in online language courses. They offered suggestions concerning the physical design, content design, and language use of the videos.

The physical features that were mentioned in these studies included presentation style, speaking rate, caption, and length. As for presentation style, Ma and He (2017) found out that highly-rated instructional videos for English micro-courses were able to integrate different presentation styles. Fontana and Leffa

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