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# Online Chinese Learning: A Case Study of the Use of YouTube Instructional Videos

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## Abstract

YouTube is one of many online platforms that provide good, free learning resources for students of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL). This article aims to explore the role and implications of YouTube videos in CFL education. To that end, it firstly introduces a questionnaire survey conducted among Chinese language learners in Barcelona, Spain, focusing on their viewing habits related to YouTube Chinese-learning videos. The results of the survey not only reveal the students' preferences for certain types of video content/formats, but also indicate that they make only very limited use of YouTube resources to supplement their formal language education. The article then analyzes 19 Chinese-learning YouTube channels, focusing particularly on features such as the length of their videos, the orthography used, and the language levels covered by the video content. In its conclusion, the article offers suggestions on how better use could be made of valuable online resources such as YouTube videos in CFL education.

**Keywords:** Chinese language, technology, online self-education, informal learning, YouTube

## 1 Introduction

Online resources are clearly influencing the way Chinese is taught and learned nowadays, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased their value. Among such resources, YouTube probably stands out as the major provider of audiovisual media, with more than 2 billion registered users according to YouTube statistics (July 2020).<sup>i</sup> Gutiérrez et al. (2018, p. 89) affirm that television and YouTube are the media most present in young people's daily lives, and that the latter is "gaining relevance as a source of academic knowledge for students". More specifically, Gutiérrez et al. (2018) present the experience of some secondary school students who used tutorials to complement or support what they were learning at school. The example of a Colombian student is quite illustrative of how tutorials can help learners: "I barely understand the teacher I have now. So I watch YouTube videos about what we are studying and I understand them and it's easier." (Gutiérrez et al., 2018, p. 89).

However, despite there being potential for including YouTube tutorials or instructional videos in classes of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) or for recommending them for autonomous practice, there is currently a lack of studies that analyze and classify video resources of the kind in question according to criteria such as formal aspects, level, and main content. Furthermore, we know little about how students use YouTube tutorials to complement or

supplement formal CFL teaching, or about their preferences and habits in that regard. This article thus seeks to shed light on these matters.

The article's main objective is to explore how students of Chinese currently use Chinese-learning channels on YouTube. There are two secondary objectives: firstly, to better understand a sample of CFL learners' uses of and preferences regarding YouTube; and, secondly, to analyze a corpus of 19 such channels on the basis of their main formal features. This is relevant and significant as a first step towards a better understanding of current learning practices and how they can be improved, especially in terms of enhancing the potential of YouTube videos. The findings made will be used to provide recommendations for teachers and students on how to use YouTube videos as part of either autonomous or distance learning.

## **2 The Use of Videos in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

As long ago as in 1989, Altman pointed to the potential of using videotaped materials in foreign language learning, devoting four entire chapters of his monograph to suggestions for teachers. He recommended using video for "its authenticity, its representation of real speech, its visual reinforcement, its presentation of the nonverbal aspects of language, its value as a cultural vehicle, and its motivating potential" (Altman, 1989, p. 47). Videos can be used to support or contextualize various kinds of content: grammar, cultural topics, vocabulary, etc. Altman (1989) suggested using short segments of authentic videos as a supplement for other materials and choosing videos to fulfill specific functions. He also stressed the mediating role of the teacher in promoting interaction among students. Besides these more general suggestions, Altman (1989) proposed specific exercises and activities for specific purposes, e.g., using videotaped advertisements in a grammatical unit on the imperative or using videos as a stimulus for conversation classes.

Thirty years later, we have witnessed an authentic revolution in audiovisual technologies: video-recorded materials have been democratized in terms not only of availability but also of the ease of creating and sharing them. Virtually anyone can create a video and share it via a social media platform. However, there are both pros and cons to YouTube being an open platform for sharing and watching videos. On the one hand, it might mean a wider spectrum of videos being available. On the other hand, choosing the right video to fulfill a specific linguistic function, as Altman recommended, becomes a cumbersome task. Appropriately selected YouTube video clips can be used in the classroom or at home, as Tschirner (2011) suggests. They can be used in formal learning environments, i.e., in directed, supervised or autonomous activities, as in the examples presented by Zhang (2013); in self-directed learning; or, especially when watched for both leisure and educational purposes, in informal learning environments.

YouTube and similar Chinese platforms, such as Tencent Video (腾讯), iQIYI (爱奇艺), and Rakuten Viki, which also have international versions; or Bilibili (哔哩哔哩) and Youku (优酷), which only have a Chinese interface, offer unmeasured quantities of videos, ranging from high-quality professional productions (e.g., movies or series) to low-resource amateur videos. As authentic materials, all such videos are extremely valuable resources. Masats et al. (2016, p. 237) define an "authentic document" as an oral or written text that is the result of a real communicative situation. However, video platforms also include language-teaching channels whose content does not fall into the category in question, having been created for potential viewers' competency levels. Nonetheless, students' limited competency in Chinese in early stages actually limits the potential use of authentic materials in the classroom or autonomous

activities, as they could be too difficult and even demotivating. Language-teaching channels — with graded created materials — might cater better to beginners' needs. In this respect, Tschirner (2011, p. 36) believes that

[v]ideo clips should be motivating and success oriented. When they engage learners intellectually, they are motivating. When they are easy to understand and when the activities that are used to exploit them are doable, they prime learners for success. Their language acquisition mechanism is engaged, SLA [second language acquisition] takes place, and learners get a sense of accomplishment. They see themselves as good learners, as people who actually understand the foreign language and who can use it to get across something they consider important.

Duffy (2008, p. 124) considers that videos “can be a powerful educational and motivational tool” if they are used well but emphasizes that they should be appropriate for target learners' learning literacy (Clark & Mayer, 2002, quoted in Duffy, 2008, p. 124). In this regard, tutorials or videos designed for teaching purposes might prove more suitable for students at early stages, as they are adapted to the learners' level and might engage them more successfully. For example, Seilstad (2012) explored the use of “tailor-made” YouTube videos (created by teachers themselves) as a pre-teaching strategy for English language learners in Morocco and found it to be effective and extremely positive. Zhang (2013) also obtained positive results when she introduced self-made narrative video clips to descriptive and narrative writing activities.

Terantino (2011, p. 12-14) stresses the potential of YouTube for language learning (in general). He puts forward three general methods in which YouTube can be utilized as an instructional tool for foreign languages: (1) using YouTube for providing linguistic and cultural content and information; (2) using YouTube as a platform via which students can share videos they have created; and (3) using YouTube for collaboration on language-based projects or for feedback on such work through the platform's comments section. Duffy (2008) suggests some activities that involve the use of YouTube videos for homework, e.g.,

- “to support language learning, at the end of one of your classes, decide on a particular topic and ask your students to search for short videos on this topic (...) and create a difficult vocabulary guide” (Duffy, 2008, p. 125).
- “YouTube can be used as a virtual library to support classroom lectures by providing students with access to video clips” (Conway, 2006, quoted in Duffy, 2008, p. 126).

Instructional videos often include a mediating language (e.g., students' mother tongue or a lingua franca such as English) to make them more accessible. On the basis of a study of the use of YouTube video clips for teaching English, Almurashi (2016, p. 39) determined that YouTube instructional videos play “a leading role in helping learners understand their English lessons” by enabling them to study outside the classroom. More than 60% of his respondents thought that YouTube instructional videos could help simplify lessons (Almurashi, 2016, p. 34). Additionally, his respondents opined that instructional videos have “audio and digital effects [that make] them more realistic and understandable” (Almurashi, 2016, p. 38). Such audiovisual effects can also “help learners to grasp the hidden meanings of some references and idioms in English language” (2016, p. 38).

YouTube video clips might also be used to foster intercultural competence, as noted by Benson (2015) in a study of comments that learners of Chinese made on such videos. Benson used discourse analysis tools to find “evidence of language and intercultural learning in comments on videos involving Chinese-English translanguaging” (2015, p. 88), i.e., videos

containing situations “when both Chinese and English are used or when the use of English or Chinese as a second language becomes a focus of attention” (2015, p. 91). Benson’s conclusions suggest that videos involving Chinese-English translanguaging trigger comments on linguistic and cultural aspects of their content and “create environments in which interactional language and intercultural learning are likely to be observed” (2015, p. 99). Qu (2018) used the video clips of the *New Practical Chinese Reader* (新实用汉语课本) series to discuss differences in non-verbal communication with Spanish students of CFL.

### 3 Research Design

The research presented in this paper was conducted in the spring term of 2019. We used a mixed method to meet the objectives established in the previous section. This involved designing a questionnaire and distributing it among CFL students in Barcelona and creating a corpus of 19 specialized YouTube channels. The results obtained by both methods are then contrasted in the ‘Discussion’ to provide a more holistic view of the situation of YouTube as a source for CFL learning and instruction.

#### 3.1 Questionnaire

We designed a Google Forms questionnaire to collect information on students’ habits and preferences. It was distributed among CFL students at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the Autonomous University of Barcelona and at the Official School of Languages in Barcelona, which we chose because of the availability of respondents and as two public institutions at which adults can currently study Chinese in Barcelona. We sent the questionnaire to the students’ teachers, who were asked to distribute it among them.

When the data were collected, Chinese was taught in two degree programs at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting: the Degree in Translation and Interpreting and the Degree in East Asian Studies.<sup>ii</sup> The language is taught throughout the four years of each program, and the questionnaire was distributed among students of both. The Official School of Languages in Barcelona is a public school that offers language courses, mainly for adults. It is the only public school for adults that offers Chinese courses in Catalonia, the region in which the study took place. Its Chinese courses cover levels A1 to B2.2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). While the questionnaire was initially only distributed among students at the two institutions in question, we also obtained responses from students from other institutions (e.g., the Confucius Institute in Barcelona) and self-directed students. This was due to the online nature of the questionnaire; once the Google Forms link was made available, students were able to share it with other learners from elsewhere.

The questionnaire (see Annex 1 for a translated version) was divided into three sections, which sought information on the respondent’s profile, their habits and preferences regarding the use of YouTube videos, and their opinion on an instructional video they were asked to watch. The video in question was Mandarin Lab’s *Distintas formas de decir sí en chino mandarín* (Different ways of saying yes in Mandarin Chinese),<sup>iii</sup> in which the presenter uses both Spanish and Chinese to teach different ways of saying ‘yes’ after a yes-no question (e.g., 是, 对, 好, 是的, 好的, 对的, and 行). We selected this video for various reasons. Firstly, it uses Spanish as a mediating language, which potential respondents might find easier to follow. Secondly, its four-minute duration is neither too long (increasing the probability of respondents watching it in its

entirety) nor too short (going beyond mere superficiality). Thirdly, the topic could appeal to both beginners and mid-level students, the targets of the questionnaire. The fact that Chinese lacks a specific word for saying ‘yes’ is usually of interest to mid-level students, who want to discover new ways of saying ‘yes’ or confirm that they know all the ways of doing so included in the video.

We retrieved a total of 51 responses. Due to the limited number of responses involved, we adopted a basic quantitative approach for the analysis of closed questions and used qualitative content analysis for open-ended questions.

### ***3.2 Creation of a Corpus of YouTube Accounts or Channels***

We created a corpus to compare and analyze the main formal features of a sample of 19 YouTube channels for learning Chinese. While YouTube members can specialize in one kind of content (e.g., CFL), some decide to diversify and create specialized channels to organize their videos. The channel functions as a homepage for the user’s account, and one user can have various YouTube channels. For the purpose of this study, only channels specializing in teaching or learning CFL were chosen (the full list can be viewed in Annex 2). Although a great many channels about the Chinese language are available on YouTube, only a few were actually included in the study, mainly because of the exploratory nature of this research, which seeks to provide a potential framework of analysis prior to the inclusion of a larger sample of channels.

To create the corpus, we extracted 19 channels at random from the results of a search performed using the YouTube search engine and the search terms ‘aprender chino’ (in Spanish) and ‘learn Chinese’. We ruled out certain channels by applying the following criteria:

- The videos had to target an adult audience. Videos aimed at children were discarded.
- The languages used in the videos had to be Chinese, English, and/or Spanish. We were unable to assess videos with other mediating languages, and we therefore discarded them.
- Videos requiring the use of a specific handbook (e.g., videos in which the presenter says: “let’s move to page X”) were discarded, as such a requirement would have been a limitation for potential viewers who lacked the handbook.

We then classified the channels according to the following formal criteria:

- Number of videos on the channel when the research was conducted (spring 2019).
- Length of videos.
- Orthography used: simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, both or none (i.e., no Chinese characters used).
- Format of videos: teacher/presenter visible or just audible (voice-off); use of animations or just a recorded PPT.
- Levels covered by the channel.

We then used the information in question to provide a general characterization of the channels included in the corpus.

## **4 Students’ Habits and Preferences**

The following subsections present the results of the questionnaire distributed among CFL students in Barcelona.

### 4.1 Description of the Sample of Respondents

As stated previously, we retrieved answers to our questionnaire from a total of 51 respondents. Females made up 78.4% of the respondents and males 21.6%, mirroring the higher proportion of women frequently found among students of language and humanities degrees in Spain. Most of the respondents (78.4%) were aged between 18 and 30, possibly due to the sampling conducted, with degree students having been targeted. Another 5.9% of the respondents were aged between 31 and 40, and 11.8% between 51 and 60. There was only one respondent aged between 41 and 50, and only one over 61.

Regarding knowledge of languages (see Figure 1), all the respondents said they speak Spanish and nearly all of them (96.1%) said they speak Catalan. A vast majority (86.3%) stated that they also speak English. Meanwhile, 27.5% said they speak French, 7.8% German, 3.9% Italian, and 35.3% other languages. These figures reflect the plurilingual condition of the sample, as well as previous experience of learning other languages.

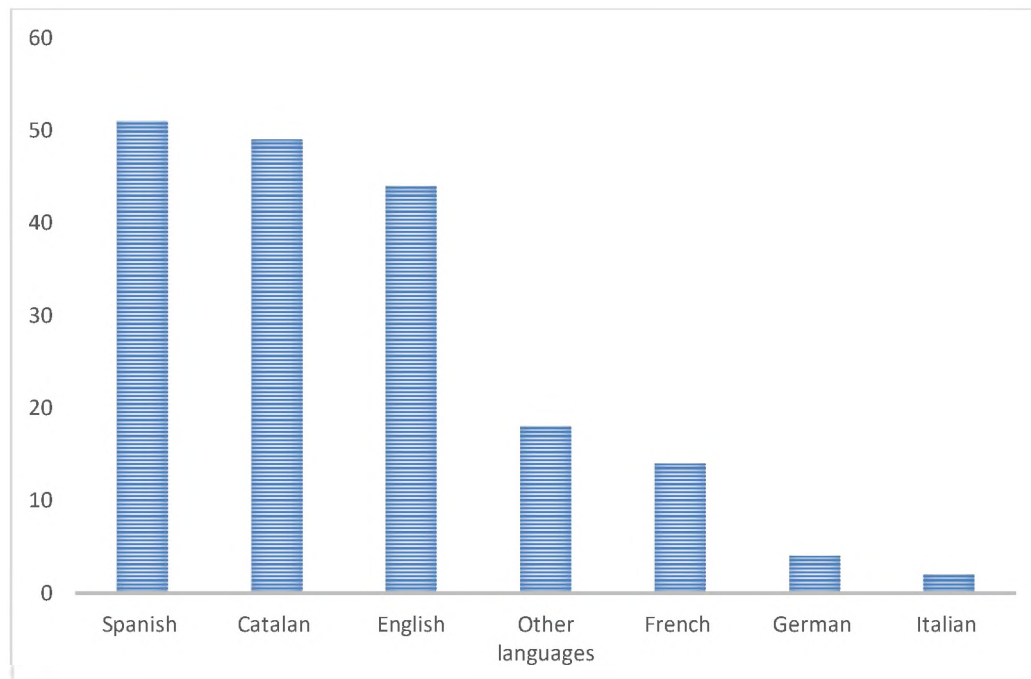


Figure 1. Languages spoken by the sample of respondents (n = 51)

### 4.2 YouTube Habits and Preferences

Most respondents (60.8%) reported using YouTube every day or nearly every day, while a smaller proportion claimed to rarely use it (15.7%) or never use it (7.8%). These figures contrast with those corresponding to the respondents' use of YouTube videos for the purpose of learning Chinese (Figure 2). Only one respondent (2%) said they often use such videos to that end, and 17.6% of the respondents remarked that they sometimes do so. As many as 49% of the respondents said they rarely view YouTube videos to learn Chinese, and 31.4% stated that they never do so.

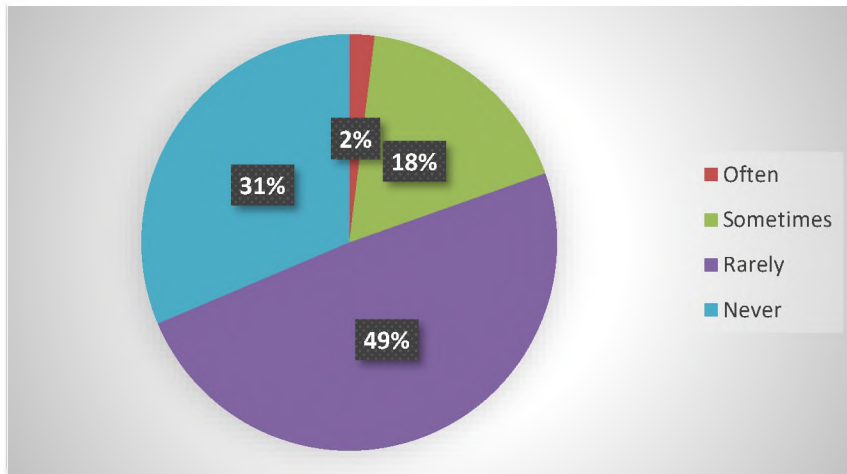


Figure 2. Frequency of use of YouTube videos to learn Chinese

The respondents were asked to indicate what they need most from YouTube videos. However, their answers do not show clear tendencies, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. *What respondents need from YouTube videos*

	Very necessary	Indifferent	Not necessary
Grammar content	21(35.6%)	14 (23.7%)	24 (40.7%)
Vocabulary and expressions related to a specific topic	14 (28.6%)	21(42.9%)	14 (28.6%)
Exercises and activities	16 (35.6%)	16 (35.6%)	13 (28.9%)

The responses show that grammar content is deemed both the most and the least necessary aspect of videos (in comparison to vocabulary and expressions, and exercises and activities). The figures involved seem to suggest that students may have very different expectations of YouTube videos, as well as heterogeneous needs. The lack of a clear trend might also be attributable to very few students actually watching YouTube videos to learn Chinese, meaning that the others are unlikely to have considered such matters before taking the questionnaire.


The students were then asked to comment on their preferences as regards YouTube videos for learning Chinese. More specifically, various examples of video formats were provided and the students had to indicate which type or types (multiple answers were allowed) they preferred. The various possible answers are listed below and were presented to the respondents as shown in Figure 3:

- A: There is a visible teacher in the video.
- B: A teacher explains the content in voice-off.
- C: The creators of the content explain it in a talk or discussion.
- D: Drama series with explanatory flashes.
- E: Exercises or tests.



5. Por favor, escoja la forma o las formas de video que prefiere. \*

**A**




☐ Hay un profesor o profesora presencial.

**B**




☐ Hay un profesor o una profesora que explica pero no presencial

**C**



☐ Los creadores de contenido explican los mismos durante una discusión o una charla.

**D**



☐ Serie, flash con explicaciones

**E**



☐ Ejercicios o tipo test

Figure 3. Options provided for commenting on format preferences

Answers were distributed as follows:

1. More than half the respondents (54.9%) expressed a preference for option A, i.e., videos in which a visible teacher explains the lesson.
2. 51% marked option B, i.e., videos in which a teacher explains the content in voice-off.
3. 41.2% chose option E, i.e., exercises or tests.
4. 33.3% chose option C, i.e., videos in which the creators of the content explain it in a talk or discussion.

5. The least chosen option was D, i.e., series of drama videos with explanatory flashes, which was marked by 27.5% of the sample.

The responses to this question provide relevant information, in that they reflect a clear preference for videos with a teacher/presenter (either visible or in voice-off) who guides students.

Contrastingly, the lowest level of preference corresponds to videos in which the role of the teacher is less explicit.

### ***4.3 Perceptions after Viewing a YouTube Video***

Finally, the students were asked to watch a four-minute Mandarin Lab video in which a teacher/presenter explains various ways of replying affirmatively to different questions. The respondents were asked for open answers to the questions: “Do you think this video is easy to understand? Do you like it? Why?” The majority (72.5%) gave entirely positive answers. A smaller proportion (23.5%) gave mainly positive answers that also contained some kind of criticism or suggestions for improvement. Only one person offered a totally negative opinion. As far as the positive answers are concerned, 35 (of the total of 51) respondents explicitly mentioned that they liked the video because “it is clear” or “easy to understand” thanks to the teacher/presenter, and 13 of them also praised the wide range of examples provided by the teacher/presenter. Seven respondents mentioned that the video is entertaining and liked the visual prompts used in it, and five said they liked it because it is well organized. Three respondents said they found the video useful, three thought its length optimal, and two liked the text displayed on the screen. One of the most detailed responses, which may well summarize the positive comments in general, was the following:

“Yes, I like the video, I think it is well organized and dynamic. It is long enough to be sufficiently informative, but not so long that watching it feels like a chore (furthermore, being a short video, you can watch it when you have a little spare time, and do so as often as you like until everything is clear, without having to spend too long on it). In brief, it is easy to understand, concise and informative. The inclusion of pinyin next to the characters and the pronunciation of a person who is apparently bilingual are noteworthy bonuses.”<sup>iv</sup>

In another positive comment, one of the respondents mentioned appreciating the video’s explanation of which ‘yes’ responses are more informal in Chinese. They especially liked “the part about answering using the same verb [used in the question], which is something I never learned at school and had to learn for myself by listening to conversations”.<sup>v</sup>

Some respondents, while providing positive comments, gave suggestions for improving the video. For example, two mentioned that a final summary at the end of the video would be useful, and two said they would like more examples in Chinese. Among the negative comments made, two respondents found the video “ok, but boring”, one found it repetitive, and one disliked its aesthetical aspects.

Two respondents explained that they found the video useful but would not want videos to substitute the teacher-student interaction of formal learning:

“I think it is easy to understand and I like it, but I do not think I could learn Chinese with just videos like this. You would need to attend classes where you could study with texts to see how these concepts are used, as well as to practice using them orally.”<sup>vi</sup>

“I think that what she says is fine and I like the way she explains it, but I think this approach would only serve for very basic things. Once things get difficult, it is much better to have a more interactive system where you can get answers to your questions.”<sup>vii</sup>

Finally, the respondent who provided the only totally negative answer did not find the explanations and examples easy to understand, and simply stated that he/she “did not like it”, without further details.

## 5 Main Features of the Channels Analyzed

The channels we selected at random and included in the corpus had uploaded a total of 3034 videos up to spring 2019, giving a mean of 160 videos per channel. There were substantial differences among channels. Those with the largest volume of videos were FluentU Chinese (584 videos) and Learn Chinese with ChineseClass101.com (489 videos). At the other end of the scale were Active Chinese (22 videos), Elitemandarin (24 videos), and Slow & Clear Chinese (31 videos).<sup>viii</sup> These data clearly reflect one of the main problems with using videos from YouTube: the number of videos available is so huge that it is virtually impossible to assess them all individually, especially just to prepare a lesson or course content.

Regarding video length, most channels contain short clips that last for less than 10 minutes. The only exception is Mandarin Corner, which has no videos that are less than 20 minutes long and includes some that run for up to 50 minutes. The videos uploaded by Mandarin Corner, with titles such as *50 sentences for eating and traveling* and *42 essential sentence patterns*, look to convey a considerable amount of information in just one clip. Learn Chinese with ChineseClass101.com is the channel with the widest range of videos in terms of length, with the shorter ones lasting around two minutes and the longer ones 50 minutes. Nine channels publish only short clips less than six minutes long, and six channels contain videos from two to 20 minutes long. One of the channels that provide short videos is Crazy Fresh Chinese, whose content focuses on very specific words, sentences or expressions; for example, one video is devoted just to the word 冰淇淋 (ice-cream). In general, the relatively short length of most of the videos might increase the likelihood of them being used as classroom resources or for autonomous activities. Short videos are easier to combine with other classroom activities or even to use as a wrap-up after explaining certain points. Furthermore, it is commonly held that the optimal length of YouTube videos is between two and four minutes.<sup>ix</sup> Applying this to CFL instructional videos, it can be assumed that users will find it easier to concentrate on videos of that length, be it in a classroom or working on their own. This was reflected in the responses to the questionnaire, with three of the respondents explicitly mentioning the short length (four minutes) of the video they had watched as something they viewed positively.

Based on the samples selected for this study, few channels include traditional Chinese characters. Traditional and simplified characters are used together in just one case, the Fluent in Mandarin.com channel, where, despite not being used systematically, traditional characters are featured briefly to illustrate points in relation to writing certain simplified characters. The only channel that uses no characters at all is FluentU Chinese, the channel with the largest volume of videos, and this omission might be due to its focus on oral competency. Further research should look at whether channels also include pinyin and how systematically they do so.

Regarding video format, 14 of the channels have a visible teacher/presenter who explains the lesson. This seems to be a common format on YouTube and was the respondents' preferred option in the questionnaire. We also sought to determine whether any of the videos' teachers/presenters are not native Chinese speakers, but, owing to their personal information not always being available, we had to make hypotheses based on their racial traits. Most teachers/presenters have Chinese/Asian racial traits and thus seem to be native Chinese speakers

(this should be confirmed with them). There are only four exceptions, three of which are channels with teachers/presenters who do not have Chinese/Asian racial traits but speak Chinese fluently (Fluent in Mandarin.com, Learn Chinese Now, and Crazy Fresh Chinese). The fourth is a channel with various teachers/presenters, Learn Chinese with ChineseClass101.com. This channel mainly features teachers/presenters with Chinese/Asian racial traits in video-lessons, but its motivational videos with tips for studying Chinese are presented by a person without Chinese/Asian racial traits. Among the 14 channels with visible teachers/presenters, 10 have female teachers/presenters, three have male teachers/presenters, and one combines males and females. Where the five videos without visible teachers/presenters are concerned, three feature animations, one features a teacher in voice-off with complementary photographs, and one consists of activities (e.g., dictation or character recognition) with a voice-off and pictures that complement each other in such a way that students can use the exercises autonomously to self-correct. In the questionnaire, 41.2% of the respondents chose videos containing exercises or tests as one of their preferred options. However, only one channel included in the corpus focuses on videos of that kind, which might reflect a lower level of presence in general.

All the channels analyzed include content for beginner levels, but only three reach advanced levels, such as level C1 of the CEFR. The three are Mandarin Lab, Slow & Clear Chinese, and ActiveChinese, which are the most comprehensive channels.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusions

In this section, data from both methods is compared and used to draw a first approach towards the study and research of YouTube videos for CFL teaching and learning. While the two sets of data were collected separately, the combination of both in this discussion section provides an enriched picture of current trends, habits and needs.

YouTube provides an ocean of resources for teaching and learning Chinese and can potentially be adapted to any kind of learning environment (formal education, self-directed education, informal education, etc.). However, YouTube's main asset is also its main drawback: navigating such a huge ocean is not always easy for either teachers or students. This is the major feeling arising from a formal analysis of 19 channels that, collectively, offer more than 3000 videos. As far as formal features are concerned, video length is heterogenous but there is a clear tendency towards short videos less than 10 minutes long, and such brevity is viewed positively in students' comments in the questionnaire. Empirical research would be needed in order to determine the most appropriate length for CFL instructional videos.

Most of the channels analyzed feature a teacher/presenter who explains vocabulary, grammar or other content. This too corresponds to the preferences of students, who view the guidance of a teacher figure in such instructional videos positively. This finding may reflect the way language is learned and taught in the Spanish education system, where the traditional teacher-guided approach coexists with more communicative and task-based or project-based approaches. It would be interesting to replicate this study in other countries and compare students' attitudes and preferences.

The results presented in this article, while limited and only exploratory in nature, have led us to a number of ideas and recommendations. Firstly, the creation of databases of YouTube resources, from which videos could be retrieved according to different search criteria (e.g., length, level, topic), would certainly reduce the time and effort that trying to find suitable videos for a particular lesson, group and level requires. Currently, the YouTube search engine only

allows for searches based on keywords included in the title of a video, the name of a channel or a video's description. Furthermore, descriptions are often very brief and can be insufficient for an initial assessment of a video's adequacy. Thus, choosing the right video to intellectually engage and motivate learners is not easy. A large, open-access database would be a great contribution to the entire community of CFL teachers and learners, as it would really simplify the task of finding the most suitable videos for any given purpose. Such a database could involve a collaborative approach, where users could even recommend and classify videos. In addition to length and topic, video format (whether a video features a teacher/presenter, is an animation, etc.) would be a useful search criterion, as would the orthography used and the level of language ability required, which should be expressed using various reference systems (e.g., HSK, CEFR) in order to increase the potential use of the database around the world.<sup>x</sup>

Secondly, students' responses to our questionnaire show that YouTube resources for learning Chinese are clearly under-used. This implies that teachers do not suggest working with YouTube instructional videos as an autonomous activity to complement their classes, and that students do not search for videos, as a self-directed activity, to supplement what they have learned in the classroom, possibly due to the content of YouTube videos not being directly related to the content studied in class. Further research with a larger sample of respondents would be useful to explore the reasons for such infrequent use of YouTube instructional videos as a CFL resource, and also to get a clearer idea as to the kind of content that would be most appreciated, an issue in relation to which the answers to our questionnaire reflected no clear trend.

Regarding the use of YouTube instructional videos in formal learning environments, research involving teachers would shed light on their needs and views. Nevertheless, teachers could use such videos for pre-teaching activities (Seilstad, 2012) or 预习, where students do preparatory work before the teacher's explanation; for autonomous revision activities (复习), where students revisit what they have done in the classroom; and even for main activities in a flipped classroom format, where students would watch explanations at home and devote their classroom time to asking questions, clearing up doubts, and practicing under the teacher's guidance. In this respect, further research is needed to analyze the teaching approaches used and the quality of the explanations provided by teachers/presenters in YouTube videos.

Our study is exploratory in nature, as already mentioned, and seeks to stimulate further research in this field. However, it is still significant and innovative for various reasons: first, because it seeks to shed light on a largely unexplored topic (the use of YouTube instructional videos for CFL language and learning) and to provide a methodology to approach it. Second, because it addresses one of the challenges teachers of CFL need to face nowadays: how to best use existing audiovisual resources that adapt to new ways of learning among younger students. The rise of specific platforms exclusively focusing on videos (e.g., TikTok) or strongly promoting them (e.g., Instagram) has totally changed the ways young students consume digital contents and stresses even more the need to make the most of video resources that could successfully attract students' attention.

As possible ways of further researching this topic, a larger corpus of YouTube channels or TikTok/Instagram accounts, or a larger sample of questionnaire respondents would be needed to confirm or complete the information presented here. Additionally, new studies could ask more detailed questions (concerning the role of teachers in the promotion of YouTube or other social media instructional videos to support CFL learning, for example) so that trends could be better defined.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire Used for Data Collection

The original questionnaire was part of Xu Yanjun's MA thesis. It was in Spanish and was configured using Google Forms. The following is a translation of the questions included:

#### (a) Respondent profile

1. Sex: ☐ male ☐ female ☐ n/a
2. Age group: ☐ 18-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61 or over ☐ n/a
3. What languages do you speak? ☐ Spanish ☐ Catalan ☐ English ☐ German ☐ French ☐ Italian ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please indicate your education level: ☐ basic education ☐ baccalaureate ☐ vocational training ☐ bachelor's degree ☐ master's degree ☐ PhD ☐ Other ☐ n/a
5. Current occupation: ☐ student ☐ working ☐ on leave ☐ other ☐ n/a
6. Where do you study Chinese? ☐ Autonomous University of Barcelona ☐ Barcelona Official School of Languages ☐ Confucius Institute ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### (b) Use of YouTube

1. Do you think it is possible to complete beginner-level training (up to level B1) by means of self-learning using YouTube?  
☐ Yes, probably ☐ Maybe, it depends on each individual ☐ No, it is impossible
2. How often do you use YouTube? 1 = never / 5 = every day or almost every day  
1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5
3. Do you use YouTube to learn Chinese?  
☐ Yes, very often.  
☐ Yes, often.  
☐ Yes, sometimes.  
☐ Yes, but seldom.  
☐ No.
4. Please order the following options to show what you feel you need from YouTube videos:  
*Mark only one option per row.*

	Grammar content	Vocabulary and expressions related to a specific topic	Exercises and activities
Very necessary			
Indifferent			
Not necessary			

5. Please indicate your preferred video format(s).  
*Mark all that apply.*

- A: There is a visible teacher in the video.
- B: A teacher explains the content in voice-off.
- C: The creators of the content explain it in a talk or discussion.
- D: Drama series with explanatory flashes.
- E: Exercises or tests.

5. Por favor, escoja la forma o las formas de video que prefiere. \*

**A**



☐ Hay un profesor o profesora presencial.

**B**



☐ Hay un profesor o una profesora que explica pero no presencial

**C**



☐ Los creadores de contenido explican los mismos durante una discusión o una charla.

**D**



☐ Serie, flash con explicaciones

**E**



☐ Ejercicios o tipo test

Figure 3. Options provided for commenting on format preferences

### c) Opinions after watching a video

- Here is a link to a video from the Mandarin Lab channel. Please watch the video and answer the questions below.

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=bMqep-YIJcI>

What do you think of the video? Do you like it? Why?



## Appendix B

### List of YouTube Channels Analyzed

1	
Name	ActiveChinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/ActiveChinese/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/ActiveChinese/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2008. Their last video was uploaded in December 2009.
Length and contents	Animated videos with short conversations or cultural aspects.
Level	Mostly A1-A2.

2	
Name	Bunkyo Escuela de Chino
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgDiigoRHQILsRZkr0ho2ng/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgDiigoRHQILsRZkr0ho2ng/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2013 and their last video was uploaded in February 2019.
Length and contents	Short videos with a professor explaining a certain topic like the use of a word or Chinese food.
Level	Mostly A1-A2.

3	
Name	CrazyFreshChinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/CrazyFreshChinese/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/CrazyFreshChinese/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2013 and their last video was uploaded in June 2017.
Length and contents	Short vlog with explanation of the use of one word.
Level	Mostly A1-A2.

4	
Name	Elitemandarin
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/elitemandarin/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/elitemandarin/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2013 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly short-medium videos with explanations of the use of vocabulary or HSK lessons.
Level	Mostly A1-B2.

5	
Name	EverydayChinese - Learn Chinese in Chinatown
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSXriUqkzZmAQklQ0N9XFVw/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSXriUqkzZmAQklQ0N9XFVw/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2017 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.

Length and contents	Videos covering various topics like vocabulary, grammar, writing characters. Various lengths (from around 10 minutes to more than one hour).
Level	Mostly A1- A2.

6	
Name	Fluency in Chinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnx4vIe4HYuo2pz0mTjzIIQ/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnx4vIe4HYuo2pz0mTjzIIQ/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive (?). It started uploading videos in 2018 and their last video was uploaded in August 2020.
Length and contents	Short videos with explanations of the use of one word.
Level	Mostly A1-B2 level vocabulary.

7	
Name	Fluent in Mandarin.com
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/gaoyoude1/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/gaoyoude1/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2011 (previous videos were about the experience of language learning by the owner) and their last video was uploaded in February 2020.
Length and contents	It contains both short (less than 10 minutes) clips and 10 to 20 minutes videos with explanations of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.
Level	Mostly A1 – B1.

8	
Name	FluentU Chinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/FluentUChinese/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/FluentUChinese/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2013 and their last video was uploaded in November 2019.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos of conversations or basic expressions.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2.

9	
Name	Happy Chinese with Liling (originally Happy Chinese)
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUwv_gudmKfHkng6C5RPwRA/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUwv_gudmKfHkng6C5RPwRA/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2015 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos about grammar points or basic expressions.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2.

10	
Name	汉语学习网
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC30av_anvIrQphKwXnlkQA/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC30av_anvIrQphKwXnlkQA/videos</a>

Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2012 and their last video was uploaded in July 2014.
Length and contents	It contains both short (less than 5 minutes) clips and 10 to 20 minutes videos with Chinese idioms stories, Chinese lessons, and character writing.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2.

## 11

Name	Learn Chinese with Litao
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/LitaoChinese/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/LitaoChinese/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2013 and their last video was uploaded in December 2018.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos about the use of certain vocabulary, pinyin, grammar points and basic expressions.
Level	Mostly A1 – A2.

## 12

Name	Learn Chinese Now
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/learnchinesenow/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/learnchinesenow/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2012 and their last video was uploaded in October 2018.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos about the use of grammar points and cultural aspects.
Level	Mostly A1 – A2.

## 13

Name	Learn Chinese with ChineseClass101.com
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/chineseClass101/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/chineseClass101/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2009 and their last video was uploaded in November 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly videos of vocabulary, Chinese stories, and study tips.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2.

## 14

Name	Learn Chinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4-q1Ah6ZnHljEUaf5H0Kig/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4-q1Ah6ZnHljEUaf5H0Kig/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2015 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos of vocabulary and Chinese stories.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2.

## 15

Name	LearnchineseWithEmma
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/learnchineseWithEmma/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/learnchineseWithEmma/videos</a>

Activity	Inactive. It started uploading videos in 2011 and their last video was uploaded in April 2019.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos of vocabulary and expressions.
Level	Mostly A1 – A2.

16	
Name	Learning Chinese through Stories
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDSSndxcaLY--eS5p9a2rQ/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDSSndxcaLY--eS5p9a2rQ/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2016 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly videos of Chinese stories and broadcast.
Level	Mostly A1 – C1.

17	
Name	Mandarin Corner
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2fAiROHROT9aj9P_jjYeow/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2fAiROHROT9aj9P_jjYeow/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2017 and their last video was uploaded in November 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly videos of vocabulary, grammar points and cultural aspects.
Level	Mostly A1 – C1.

18	
Name	Mandarin Lab
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv6O3FzYuRv1-VGRNdT4_Yw/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv6O3FzYuRv1-VGRNdT4_Yw/videos</a>
Activity	Active. It started uploading videos in 2016 and their last video was uploaded in October 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly videos of vocabulary, expressions, and cultural aspects.
Level	Mostly A1 – A2.

19	
Name	Slow & Clear Chinese
URL	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdwdSGQsSbcapDmODtOr58g/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdwdSGQsSbcapDmODtOr58g/videos</a>
Activity	Inactive (?). It started uploading videos in 2016 and their last video was uploaded in August 2020.
Length and contents	Mostly short videos of Chinese listening practice and lessons.
Level	Mostly A1 – B2 level content.

## 论线上汉语学习：以 YouTube 教学视频的应用为例

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YouTube 平台是诸多为汉语作为外语（CFL）学习的学生提供优质免费学习资源的线上平台之一。本文旨在探讨 YouTube 视频在 CFL 教学过程中所扮演的角色和影响。为此，本文首先在西班牙巴塞罗那的汉语学习者中展开了问卷调查，重点调查他们观看 YouTube 平台上的汉语学习视频的习惯。问卷调查结果不仅揭示了学习者对于特定类型的视频内容或形式的偏好，同时也反映出只有极少部分的 YouTube 资源被学生们用来作为对他们的正规语言学习内容的补充。之后，本文重点从视频长度、汉字书写规则以及视频内容所涵盖的语言等级等方面研究了 19 个汉语学习频道。最后，本文就如何更有效地利用如 YouTube 视频等宝贵的线上资源进行 CFL 教学提出了一些建议。

**Keywords:** Chinese language, technology, online self-education, informal learning, YouTube

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<sup>i</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/about/press/>.

<sup>ii</sup> A new degree program including Chinese as a second language has been introduced in 2020-21 (Degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies).

<sup>iii</sup> URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMqep-YIJcI> (accessed on 22 July 2020).

<sup>iv</sup> Original response in Spanish, translated into English by the authors of the paper: “Sí me gusta, creo que está bien estructurado y tiene buen ritmo, el vídeo tiene la duración justa como para ser lo suficientemente informativo pero no es excesivamente largo como para que te genere pereza el hecho de verlo (además que al ser un video corto lo puedes ver cuando tienes un rato libre o lo puedes volver a ver cuántas veces quieras para que te quede todo claro sin dedicarle un lapso de tiempo excesivo.) En resumen, bien explicado, breve e informativo, que se adjunte el pinyin junto a los caracteres y la pronunciación de una persona, al parecer bilingüe, es un plus a tener muy en cuenta.”

<sup>v</sup> Original response in Spanish, translated into English by the authors of the paper: “Me gusta mucho, es muy interesante que explique qué formas son más informales y también la parte de responder con el mismo verbo, esto nunca lo aprendí en clase, y lo tuve que aprender a base de escuchar conversaciones.”

<sup>vi</sup> Original response in Spanish, translated into English by the authors of the paper: “Creo que está bien explicado y me gusta, pero no creo que pudiera aprender el idioma chino solamente con videos así. Sería necesario acudir a clases en los que se trabajara con textos y así ver como se utilizan esos conceptos, así como la práctica oral de los mismos.”

<sup>vii</sup> Original response in Spanish, translated into English by the authors of the paper: “Me parece que lo que dice es correcto y me gusta como lo explica, pero creo que esta modalidad sólo sirve para cosas muy básicas. Cuando las cosas se complican, es mucho mejor un sistema más interactivo para poder resolver dudas.”

<sup>viii</sup> While Active Chinese and Slow & Clear Chinese have not uploaded any more videos since we collected our data, Elitemandarin contained 114 videos in July 2020, indicating the incorporation of new content on a regular basis.

<sup>ix</sup> See, for instance: *The perfect video length for any application in 2019* (URL: <https://blog.mynd.com/en/perfect-video-length>, last accessed on 19 October 2020); or *How Long Should Your Videos Be? Ideal Lengths for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube* (URL: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-long-should-videos-be-on-instagram-twitter-facebook-youtube>, last accessed on 19 October 2020).

<sup>x</sup> A similar database is currently being developed for Chinese digital resources: <https://dtieao.uab.cat/txicc/echinese/theproject> (last accessed on 17 November 2021)