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Abstract

More and more new forms of medium of communication have surfaced in the past decade. Videos have become a way of how we make sense of the world around us. Popular video-sharing sites include YouTube, Vimeo and DailyMotion. Among these three video-sharing sites, YouTube ranks the highest. Using YouTube as a medium of communication has become a part of more and more lives. Here, I am going to compare YouTube to speech and to text in seven aspects illustrated by Crystal (2006). Besides making comparisons, we will examine how the properties of YouTube shape the language and society in general.

YouTube is a video-sharing website launched in February 2005. It was ranked as the fourth most visited website in the world, serving more than 33 million users each day (YouTube, 2014). Each month, over 6 billion hours of video are watched by people all around the world on YouTube (YouTube, 2014).

The name **YouTube** has an interesting story to tell. The **you** in **YouTube** refers to second person singular or plural, a person who is directly addressed whereas **tube** refers to the television, which materially used to be based on cathode ray tubes (CRTs) (Sun, 2013). YouTube provides a platform where people can discover, view and share videos for free. People from across the globe are able to connect with each other through videos. Adding on, living in a very technologically advanced generation, we can even watch YouTube on mobile and other tablet devices. Access to YouTube is no longer limited to only computer or laptop users. This can be proven by the fact that 100 million people take a social action on YouTube (likes, shares, comments, etc.) every week meaning that they have easy access to the website.

Using the seven features introduced by Crystal (2006), we will examine the speech like and text like characteristics of YouTube and determine how YouTube stands with reference to these characteristics.

Table 1: *Comparison between speech-like and text-like of YouTube*

Speech like	Text like
x Time bound	✓ Space bound
x Spontaneous	✓ Contrived
x Face-to-face	✓ Visually decontextualized
✓ Loosely structured	x Elaborately structured
✓ Socially interactive	✓ Factually communicative
x Immediately revisable	✓ Repeatedly revisable
✓ Prosodically rich	✓ Graphically rich

Interaction in YouTube is not time-governed. Uploaders often encourage viewers to ask questions and expect feedbacks from the viewers. However, unlike speech in the non-virtual world, the response towards the videos and comments need not be immediate. The response need not come from a specific person either. Users can choose to comment or not comment on the video, whenever they like. In addition, they are transient. That is, the comments can be lost to attention as users scroll off the screen. Much like text, people can refer to the same videos and comments repeatedly. However, with over 100 hours worth of video material uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube, 2014), the appearance of the site changes each time you encounter it. In this case, YouTube is partially space bound. In addition, videos can also be blocked or deleted at any time. Comments can also be deleted by clicking on 'Report spam or abuse' in the option menu beside the comment. YouTube is text-like because it is space bound but not static (text is space bound and static); YouTube is speech-like because it is transient but not time bound.

YouTube videos are usually contrived and lack spontaneity. This can be better understood by taking into account the time lag between the production and reception of a video. There are quite a few procedures that take place from the uploading to the watching of a video (there are a few steps the uploader and the viewer have to go through before the video is viewed by people). As for the uploader, there is the production, uploading and publishing of a video. And as for the viewer, there is the streaming and playing of a video. For instance, before the video is published, video bloggers (vloggers) have the opportunity to thoroughly plan and

execute the production of the video. Most audios from the videos are recorded speech. Unlike normal face-to-face interaction, vloggers get to plan their script before recording the video. In the non-virtual world, speech is relatively spontaneous because participants need to gather their thoughts while delivering their points through talking. However, in the virtual world of YouTube, uploaders get to plan beforehand, revise and edit their videos in order to ensure everything is in its desired form before it is published for the world to see. Therefore, it is very unlikely for spontaneous interaction to take place on YouTube, which differs from our experience in a face-to-face conversation. The only trace of speech spontaneity that can be found is through the immediate replies left by viewers' in the comments section right after the video is published.

The communication among YouTube users is visually decontextualized. There is limited visual contact between users in, for instance, video blogs (vlogs). Viewers rely on extralinguistic cues such as gestures, facial expressions or tone to understand the non-literal meaning and literal meaning expressed by the vlogger. However, vloggers only receive feedback from viewers through comments instead of through visual expression. The only visual aspect of it is when emoticons are used to express emotions and feelings in comments. Other than that, the visual element is very little apart from how vloggers provide viewers with cues such as facial expressions. Hence, it is more of a one-sided exchange in terms of visual expression. Furthermore, there is no immediate feedback nor can the pace of which the exchange will take place be predicted unlike the immediate reaction you can expect in a face-to-face conversation. This is because deictic expressions are unique to face-to-face conversations as it raises ambiguity. Deictic expressions are expressions that occur mostly in face-to-face conversations. Since immediate feedback is a main element of face-to-face interactions, deictic expressions are unlikely to be ambiguous in these situations. The interesting part is that although feedback is not immediate in YouTube interaction, deictic expressions can be used without misunderstanding. For example, the word '**here**' in 'Click here to watch behind the scenes.' refers to the hyperlink the owner wants the users to click on.

Interactions between YouTube users through comments display characteristics of speech despite being in the form of writing. Most of the comments

are informal and loosely structured. Occasionally, users post elaborately structured comments too. In order to express themselves in a speech-like manner, users use contracted forms (**she's**, **can't**), random capitalizations, emoticons, exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, and also emphatic conventions:

All capital letters to indicate emphatic stress: 'SHE IS AMAZING!'

Repeated letters for exaggerating: 'yeaahhhhhhhhh'

Repeated and combined punctuation: 'what did I just watch?!?!?!?!'

Internet slang words are also abundantly found. These words are often abbreviations of a phrase in the form of capitalized letters, such as:

ROTFL: Roll on the floor laughing

YOLO: You only live once

CYA L8R: See you later

The creativity of the language used by Internet users has brought writing to life. More emotion and feelings is expressed through their writing. Hence, causing interaction to be more communicative and expressive.

Users can get both factually communicative and socially interactive on YouTube. There are a wide variety of channels that provide very useful information. Channels like Science & Education, Cooking & Health, News & Politics and How-to & DIY are rich in information. YouTube is in fact more factually communicative than textually. This is because YouTube provides factual information through demonstration. The instructions are clearer and easier to understand. The main problem of using plain text to explain instructions is that instruction through this medium is abstract and hard to understand. However, step-by-step tutorials and demonstration videos on YouTube eases the daily lives of people greatly. The medium of YouTube provides such great ease in the conveying of information that there ends up being too much information conveyed (the downside). For example, even demonstrations of basic household chores or very simple activities such as 'How to tie a tie', 'How to fold a shirt' to 'How to wash your face' can be found on YouTube. Besides revealing interesting facts, YouTube users can share their

experiences, emotion and opinions with the world. Thus allowing people around the world(those who watch the videos) to communicate ideas and feelings freely through a steps as simple as leaving a comment or liking a video. The sharing of interesting videos via Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and other social media sites bonds relationships between friends and family and facilitates membership negotiation within social networks (Lange, 2007). (This has a similar function to speech, speech plays the same role - bonds people.) Adding on, it is better than face-to-face interaction because users can share videos with people overseas (not restricted by geographical boundaries) as long as they can access the Internet. Another social aspect of YouTube is that users can subscribe to channels they are interested in. By doing so, they are able to connect with people of mutual interests whilst keeping themselves updated from the channels they have subscribed to.

YouTube videos are repeatedly revisable but not immediately revisable. The production of a video involves thorough preparation on behalf of the video uploader. The video material have to be pondered over, revised and edited before the information is received by those who watch the videos. Only the final product is presented to the viewers. Viewers may not know the existence of original sketches or deleted parts of the video. If an interruption occurs during the production of a video, it is invisible in the final product, meaning viewers do not know if there is any interruption going on in the making of the video. The uploader should be careful of the content and the originality of the video. Once a video is published on YouTube, it is exposed to the world, errors in the video cannot be withdrawn. The uploader has to bear with the consequences of the uploaded material. Even if the video is taken down then, the harmful effects that the video had on users who previously watched it could not be reversed. This characteristic is similar to speech.

YouTube is not only graphically rich, but prosodically rich as well. Conventional writing only consists of plain text. Compared to conventional writing, YouTube is graphically rich in many ways. One of the feature is hyperlink, a reference to other text just a click away. Hyperlink makes access of information much more convenient for web users, something impossible to be done in conventional writing. As technology became more advanced, multimedia support – sound, video and film were introduced to the Web. Surfing the net has become a

more enjoyable experience because multimedia support stimulates the senses of the users – vision and sound. In short, YouTube is graphically rich because it has a wide variety of colours, graphics, hypertext links and multimedia support. Prosodically, YouTube is rich in the sense that many nuances of intonation can be found in videos. The prosody expresses the non-literal meaning, such as social relationships and attitudes. This characteristic is similar to that of speech in face-to-face interactions.

Undeniably, YouTube plays a much important role in our lives than it did before especially among the youths. Over the years, YouTube has brought people closer together in the virtual world and in the real world. Through analyzing the properties of YouTube, it's amazing to find how YouTube is related to speech and text in different aspects. YouTube is speech-like because it involves the use of informal language, socially interactive and prosodically rich. On the other hand, YouTube is text-like because it is contrived, visually decontextualized in some ways, factually communicative, repeatedly revisable, graphically rich and has a time lag in the uploading and receiving of the information. YouTube influences our language use not only on the Internet, but in our daily lives as well.

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