

Swedish researchers, Wikipedia develop first crowdsourced speech engine

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Swedish, English and Arabic will be the first languages launched on Wikipedia's synthesised speech platform. Credit: KTH Royal Institute of Technology

By 2017, English, Swedish and Arabic speakers will find that Wikipedia is talking their language—literally. The online free encyclopedia is collaborating with Sweden's KTH Royal Institute of Technology to develop the world's first crowdsourced speech synthesis platform.

The platform will be optimised for Wikipedia but freely available as open source, and readily usable by any site that uses the MediaWiki software on which Wikimedia is based.

Joakim Gustafson, a professor of speech technology at KTH, says that the project aims to provide access to Wikipedia and other wikis to people with reading difficulties or visual impairment.

"Initially, our focus will be on the Swedish language, where we will make use of our own language resources," Gustafson says. "Then we will do a basic English voice, which we expect to be quite good, given the large amount of [open source](#) linguistic resources. And finally, we will do a rudimentary Arabic voice that will be more a proof of concept."

An estimated 25 percent of all Wikipedia users—nearly 125 million people per month—need or prefer text in spoken form, according to PTS.

Like Wikipedia's content, the speech output will be crowdsourced, with users contributing to the continuous development of the synthesizer.

Once the English, Swedish and Arabic speech engines are produced, sometime around September 2017, it will be possible with the help of users to extend synthesized speech to the remaining 280 languages in which Wikipedia is available.

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The Wikispeech pilot project is a collaboration between KTH, the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority, Wikimedia Sweden and STTS [speech technology](#) services. PTS is financing the [project](#).

Provided by KTH Royal Institute of Technology

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