

Famed TED talks available in multiple languages

13 May 2009, by Glenn Chapman



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Online video of the talks at the annual Technology Education Design ([TED](#)) conferences devoted to "ideas worth spreading" are being translated for the world to hear with the help of volunteers.

"TED's mission is to spread good thinking globally, and so it's high time we began reaching out to the 4.5 billion people on the planet who don't speak English," said TED "curator" Chris Anderson.

"We're excited to be using a bottom-up, open-source approach that will in time allow all our talks to be translated into all the world's languages."

Videos of TED Talks have been viewable free online at [ted.com](#) for about two years, but all of the talks have been in English.

The TED Open Translation Project launched with a small array of videos augmented with subtitles and transcripts in 40 languages.

"There is something magical about seeing all these languages on the same page that makes the world smaller and bigger at the same time," said executive producer of TED media June Cohen.

A TED roster of past speakers includes Microsoft co-founder [Bill Gates](#), rock star Bono, novelist Isabel Allende, and former US vice president Al Gore.

TED Talks have reportedly been viewed more than 100 million times by more than 15 million online visitors.

"A Web-empowered revolution in global education is under way," Anderson said.

"We're not far from the day when anyone on Earth can directly access the world's great teachers speaking to them in their own language. How cool is that?"

Volunteers from the TED community translate approved transcripts of talks, creating multi-lingual subtitles and full copies of the texts to accompany online videos.

Clicking on words in on-screen transcripts takes viewers instantly to corresponding portions of videos. Drop-down menus allow people to select languages for subtitles or transcripts.

"In the end, it creates the feeling we are all watching the same content at the same time and having a global experience together," Cohen said.

TED will continue adding new translations as volunteers around the world crank them out.

"Taking a leap into a very public volunteer project is daunting," Cohen said. "We are bringing people together and forming language communities that help each other make the best translations possible."

Each translation gets checked by a second person fluent in the language involved, and translators get credit for the work.

"We want to make them rock stars, and hold them accountable," Cohen said.

Feedback from viewers is used to refine translations.

Trend-setters in technology, science and the arts ended a TED gathering in California in February with hope that collaborations and clever solutions will trump the world's alarming woes.

The five-day-long conference was a seemingly endless stream of revelations aimed at provoking new looks at the planet's ills as well as its wonders.

The economic crisis, climate change, and ravaging of nature on land and at sea were among the dire challenges explored by TED's famously well-stocked brain trust.

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