



# Online Edutainment Videos—Recontextualizing and Reconceptualizing Expert Discourse in a Participatory Web-culture

Laura Santini

University of Genoa, Genoa, Italy

The online world is becoming more and more edutainment, where learning, getting informed and entertained seem to be part of one and the same activity. As a result of this current fascination, people are drawn increasingly towards a new genre, i.e. free online 20-minute long lectures that borrow from film and storytelling techniques, that are offering an engaging series of speeches and even courses in many different scientific subjects. Though English as a lingua franca is still the dominant language of the internet, as a result of a growing new trend, namely crowdsourcing translation, knowledge dissemination is further enhanced and is now reaching further into many different cultures, allowing even the so-called minor languages to regain dignity and circulate, by engaging native speakers from different cultural backgrounds. This paper offers an overview on the phenomenon of online edutainment considering the role played by collaborative users who not only enjoy but also create and translate content. In addition, a case study focused on TED Talks allows a more in depth analysis of the new genre and the increasing need for subtitling scripts.

*Keywords:* knowledge dissemination, expert discourse, TED Talks, edutainment, MOOCs

## Web-mediated Knowledge Dissemination: Online Edutainment Videos

The online world has started to offer a pro-active role to users and, more recently, as amateurs have turned into useful experts that companies recruit through smart rewarding schemes via crowdsourcing; the content industry as well as the expert discourse have been somehow disrupted and yet positively so. New trends are starting to be gauged and assessed. Edutainment that has long been associated to computer games—as entertainment with an educational aspect was poured in all sorts of online game quests—is now to be found in different typologies of video-content. Conferences, lectures, presentations, and interviews have become increasingly popular as the new web-mediated source of edutainment. Hybrid multilingual and multimodal online texts in which video<sup>1</sup>, audio and script are combined have taken hold. Data show that online video consumption has doubled. According to the latest 2013 Pew Research Internet Project report on Online Video, the percentage of American adult internet users who upload or post videos online has moved from 14% in 2009 to 31% today. There has been an increase also in the number of those who watch or download videos: from

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Laura Santini, Ph.D., Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Genoa.

<sup>1</sup> See “Online Video 2013” by Kristen Purcell, October 10, 2013, available at [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Online-Video.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Online-Video.aspx) (last accessed May 12, 2014). Data were collected by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI).

69% of internet users in 2009 to 78% today. Computer but also mobile phones have played a key role both in video viewing and creating experience—the latter ones are considered a byproduct of the increasing use of social network as well. In 2010, comedy and educational videos were already among the most widely viewed video *genres*, with 57% of all online adults saying that they watch comedy/humorous videos and 50% educational videos (“The State of Online Video” Pew report).

As a consequence of the increasing demand, the edutainment online video supply is growing in its diverse formats. Promoting the spreading of experience, knowledge, innovation, ideas, and learning, web-mediated videos cut across many research fields both in humanities and sciences. Usually, no longer than 20/30 minutes, these videos are mainly in English, access is free, and a script is available. Hence, viewers/listeners can also experience the content by reading it. As their popularity has spread widely, scripts have been translated and thus users can now select subtitles from other languages as well. This new translation need—i.e. online video subtitling—has been mainly fulfilled through crowdsourcing, thus how many translated videos there are and in what languages it is a matter strictly related to users’ active participation, skills, and passion. In spite of the common knowledge that English is the lingua-franca of the web, subtitling is now enlarging the audience beyond the English-speaking community to any computer literate person. In this respect, a linguist Nicholas Ostler in 2010 published an extensive study on the role and success of the English language as the world’s lingua-franca and he came to the conclusion that English will have no successor because none will be needed and it is rather technology advances that will step in and fill the gap—e.g. via computer translation and speech recognition. If translation accuracy varies a great deal, many websites devoted to producing online edutainment videos have implemented and developed an extremely well-structured peer-reviewing system and each translation is revised and assessed by different people before being published. As a result of this crowdsourcing activity, knowledge dissemination is further enhanced and in addition to its reaching many different cultures, which is allowing so-called minor cultures to regain dignity and to circulate, engaging native speakers from different cultural backgrounds.

Not a brand new idea, this sort of edutainment that re-conceptualizes expert discourse, relies on a novel approach to knowledge dissemination, teaching, and learning that, by combining different subjects and different languages, is quite unique. The BBC TV Channel website, for instance, has always had a dedicated section promoting English learning through its own customized news content that provides for listening, reading, and grammar activities and even English for Specific Purposes—e.g. Business English—often in partnership with the British Council. Other news broadcasters have recently followed suit with some selected stories and interviews presented in similarly short videos and available in podcasting—for example, the Arabic news TV channel Al Jazeera and its videos in Arabic or other Asian languages with English subtitles. But the new conference/lecture format comes across as more engaging for its very distinctive features that borrow from filming and storytelling techniques as well.

If entertainment has shifted towards education, education is also exploiting the current fascination people show for the internet. Though distance learning is not a novelty, modern online education is the result of a recent trend and relies heavily on free online edutainment videos. Since 2008 referred to as MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses offer free online education and “open source” distance learning that can be accessed by almost anyone regardless where they live. Launched in 2006, Kahn Academy for instance, an independent not-for-profit organization founded by Sal Kahn, was the first out of the block before well-established universities across the world teamed up and launched their own online lectures. Through dedicated websites,

US universities in particular have made available a selection of courses based on a series of videos dealing with a particular topic in a given research field ranging from foundation to advanced. The list is getting longer but the first ones were the followings: the non-profit EdX (MIT and Harvard, 2012), the for-profits Udacity (Stanford University, launched in June 2011 and started in February 2012) and Coursera another for-profit educational organization that first included Stanford University, Princeton, the University of Michigan, and the University of Pennsylvania, (April 2012). In Britain, FutureLearn, the UK-led platform owned by Open University, was launched in December 2012, and now works with more than 20 universities across England. Since the very beginning, pioneer Kahn Academy started a parallel project to crowdsource translation and subtitling of its web content, while the other MOOCs are still in the process but very little is as yet available in any other language than English—some like Coursera have started to rely on Amara, a web-based open video captioning, subtitling, and translation platform.

Among this array of diverse organizations tapping the internet and video-content for spreading knowledge and enhancing learning, TED Talks is a peculiar example of re-contextualisation and re-conceptualization of knowledge dissemination and expert discourse. Through a series of recorded conferences focusing on a variety of fields of research, talks at TED are held by both academic and non-academic speakers and are presented in a very lively, informal yet scientifically proven facts-and-figures format. A non-profit organization (owned by Sapling Foundation), TED Talks integrates recorded live talks—held at specific venues in the US and UK mainly—with a translation project<sup>2</sup> that makes those same videos available in as many as 102 languages (as of October 2013). TED Talks website also offers a news page, namely TED Blog, updating on Ted Speakers' latest findings, results, or featuring in other media, and a forum (called "Conversations") that hosts users-generated discussions both on listed videos or on any other interesting topic and is run in a typical blogging fashion with the audiences "not confined to the role of spectators" thus "not only permitted to observe" but "also invited to comment, ask questions, express doubts, criticise, and make suggestions", as scholar Anna Mauranen (2013) has recently argued in her essay on science blogging.

The website richness, its authoritativeness, the novelty of its own standard, and the extremely accurate subtitling resulting from its own crowdsourcing translation project make TED Talks stand apart as a specimen in the edutainment industry that combines a lively and creative format with scientific cutting-edge content.

This paper purpose is twofold. On the one hand, to better frame the re-contextualization and re-conceptualization process expert discourse and knowledge dissemination is experiencing in edutainment videos. The goal is to outline in two brief introductory parts the relationship between translation and subtitling through crowdsourcing. On the other hand, the paper aims at exploring—if only preliminary—TED Talks' richness as a case study, considering its features as a brand new genre and a potential emerging field of enquiry for web-mediated knowledge dissemination, corpora linguistics, and translation studies.

### **Subtitling Films vs. Subtitling Lectures, Conferences, and Interviews**

Usually subtitling is associated with the film industry and partly to TV broadcasting. It has always been about content access despite culture diversity and considered a quicker and cheaper solution to distribute

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<sup>2</sup> As stated in the website, "Launched May 2009, with 300 translations in 40 languages, and 200 volunteer translators and sponsored by Nokia, the TED Open Translation Project offers subtitles, time-coded transcripts, and the ability for any talk to be translated by volunteers worldwide. The project is one of the most comprehensive attempts by a major media platform to subtitle and index online video content. It's also a groundbreaking effort in the public, professional use of volunteer translation".

internationally. Subtitles or captions enable videos to reach a wider audience despite language diversity or any hearing-impairment issue. In addition, subtitling through crowdsourcing makes videos more searchable both by humans and search engines boosting the profits of the ad industry—thus encouraging production and supply. If on the one hand, crowdsourcing subtitles rather than recruiting professionals for the task has drastically altered the already fragile translation sector; on the other hand, the users have become responsible for knowledge dissemination: They choose what to translate and therefore what knowledge to share. As a matter of fact, the majority of these websites rely on volunteer translators, that is, the most passionate of viewers turned into collaborators that indeed spread the *word*—i.e. pass on *good stories* they first enjoyed.

A very busy activity on the web, subtitling has moved away and beyond the entertainment world and increasingly adapted to this knowledge and ideas sharing in video-content. The qualified opinions and groundbreaking results are usually delivered in lively presentations mixing formal and informal registers, as the speaker is turned into a character in his/her own right whose message is further highlighted by exploiting cinema framing techniques. Similarly to film subtitling, video subtitling is a complex task for the written text needs to fit into a limited space, match up with the spoken delivery, and has to meet further length criteria to be easily read. If length issues apply widely, edutainment clarity and readability are paramount to fulfill the informative function of these materials. What is further complicating the task is the amount of interaction and humour the speaker deploys to engage the audience in the live event, and whether s/he is also using visual aid or other tools while on stage.

Though booming, not all edutainment websites have successfully caught up with this new trend. US-based video-sharing websites like Vimeo (founded in 2004) and YouTube (2005) for example, which pioneered user-generated video content offered to the web audience for free, still lack accuracy in subtitling and even English transcripts are often extremely inaccurate as they rely on machine assistance rather than on qualified human resources. Though most videos—either by Vimeo, Youtube or those broadcasted by US Universities for their MOOCs—have no scripts, yet the percentage of online adults using video-sharing sites, both for posting and watching, has constantly grown since 2006—from 33% to 72% (Pew Research Internet Project, Report, 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Translation and Participatory Culture**

Translation is still perceived as either a creative activity that ensures the survival of writing (and languages) across time and space (Bassnett, 2002, p. 4) or as a further colonizing “suspect activity, one in which an inequality of power relations (inequalities of economics, politics, gender and geography) is reflected in the mechanics of textual production leading to submission to the hegemonic power of images created by the target culture” (Sengupta, 1995, p. 172). Today though the situation is very dynamic, online video subtitling seems to provide a new reading and understanding of translation practice set in a quite different scenario not only relative to which one culture is exercising power over the others, but also in relation to the web-mediated edutainment content that urges to be subtitled not only in the main foreign modern languages, but in as many different languages as there are speakers and listeners eager to enjoy it. Online video subtitling is enabling cultures to share knowledge, information or access each other’s ideas and research results. Looking at online video-subtitling from this perspective takes it back to the idea of the translator as a cultural facilitator and

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<sup>3</sup> See Use of video-sharing sites jumps since last year—71% of online adults use such sites now. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Video-sharing-sites.aspx> (last accessed May 12, 2014).

mediator that carries the burden and the honour of making cultures accessible to others. Knowledge dissemination is thus the result of many “actors” each contributing to spreading knowledge in a less hierarchical mode and in a more participated culture. The popularity the phenomenon has gained in a few years raises socio-cultural issues around the reason why such a big number of people across the world and across different cultures gets involved in crowdsourcing translation schemes: Is translation consciously conceived as knowledge sharing or dissemination? Empowering others to know, facilitating expert discourse to circulate, and taking part in a larger cultural project seem to be big enough a reward for thousands of users.

Crowdsourcing is a new coinage but other synonyms were already describing similar activities such as “Cultural Volunteering” and “Participatory Culture”. These are two different expressions that have been used to point to a set of practices in the world of culture for a long time. Cultural volunteering has mainly been used to refer to people giving up their free time to help in galleries, museums or charities in order to create or support with their time and experience. In June 2011, for instance, the Mayor of London explicitly acknowledged the work done by many Londoners in the cultural sector issuing the guide “Culture and Volunteering. An introduction to volunteering across the arts and cultural sector in London”—where there is “a range of examples of how organisations draw on volunteers”—and by launching a new program called *Team London*, “a city-wide initiative aimed at increasing volunteering and the engagement of Londoners in big charitable projects”. Online participatory culture through crowdsourcing is a more recent concept pointing to the many collaborative actions undertaken by people through the internet in many different fields and for many different purposes in the name of science as much as culture and most often for the sake of the global internet community or for less well-off communities or NGOs. Volunteering through crowdsourcing is a different matter altogether as Jeff Howe, a contributing editor at Wired Magazine, and one of the first to use the term, argued about its impact (2008):

Clearly a nascent revolution was a foot, one that would have a deep impact on chemistry, advertising, and a great many other fields to boot. [...] If anything, I underestimated the speed with which crowdsourcing could come to shape our culture and economy (p. 6).

The powerful force of crowdsourcing, claims Howe (2008), derives from its organic nature and “capitalizes on the deeply social strain of the human species”;

It was not the product of an economist or management consultant or marketing guru. It arose instead out of the uncoordinated actions of thousands of people, who were doing things that people like to do, especially in the companionship of other people [...] In doing so, these people incidentally created information, a commodity of no little value in an information economy (pp. 13-14).

In the last eight years, since 2005, crowdsourcing has been both a tool for sharing knowledge and the solution to many demanding scientific tasks that turned out as extremely hard either in terms of human resources needed or data-processing. Solving the computing of large amount of data has been one of the first achievements through crowdsourcing. Take for example SETI@Home and BOINC by Berkeley University, two projects launched by scientists asking internet users to allow them access to their computer’s spare time “to cure diseases, study global warming, discover pulsars, and do many other types of scientific research” (<http://boinc.berkeley.edu/>). But there are many more and apart from exploiting idle time on PCs and smart-machines, crowdsourcing is often more about exploiting people’s knowledge, passions, and skills or people’s spare time and talent. Project Gutenberg, launched in 1971, thanks to volunteers has so far digitized

and archived more than 44,000 cultural work. Wikipedia is a general reference work anyone can improve or edit thus contributing again to disseminating knowledge.

Crowdsourcing is also the story of websites started simply as creative new ideas for sharing, and later turned into profitable businesses, namely Threadless and iStockphoto (Howe, 2008). Private companies have discovered crowdsourcing as well—e.g. IBM and Procter & Gamble. Although crowdsourcing means literally asking the crowd for help, there are also hidden schemes that rely on the crowd to complete specific tasks. Transcribing old texts from very old, yellowy, and blurred books is one of these jobs that have been “assigned under cover” to the web crowd. Captcha and Re-Captcha, the softwares that verify people’s identity and are commonly applied as a security measure to the signing up of a website, have also been used for old text transcription thus exploiting people’s ability to read and transcribe even very old or blurred words. It is Luis von Ahn, the ideator of Captcha and Re-Captcha, the one that has matched the wants and needs of two different large parties on the web. Ahn recently launched another software, Duolingo on the belief that whoever wants to learn a second language is very skilled at least in his/her own mother tongue. Besides, in the translation world the computer assisted translation (CAT) tools or machine translation services have still limited success despite their recent improvements. That is the reason why Ahn has created Duolingo both to allow people from all over the world to engage in learning another language and in the meantime to work at translation tasks. According to Ahn, this is barter—i.e. the language course is for free, thus translation is done for free.

Making more and more web-content—whether user-generated or other—available to as large a number of people as possible and across as many cultures as possible is one side of the new translation trend, but there is another astonishing phenomenon that is growing around crowdsourcing and subtitling in minor languages that are preserving and encouraging native tongues to regain their role, but this is going to be discussed in the following part.

### **TED Talks—A Case Study**

Among the web-mediated knowledge dissemination tools, the renowned series of international conferences, i.e. TED Talks, can be regarded as a web genre for Knowledge Dissemination (KD) in itself. Delivered by “leading thinkers and doers” through the internet for free, these talks deal with a wide range of topics from physics to economics, from linguistics to biology, art, music, no-limits performances, theatre, and education. Users are invited to take part in many different activities through the website: A part from volunteering as translators or discuss talks, they can also organize a TEDx Event in their own institution or community.

TED started in 1984 as a one-off conference event and became an annual event in the 1990s. As described online, TED “is a non-profit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading” that originally was bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Entertainment, and Design. Along with two annual conferences—in Long Beach and Palm Springs each spring—and the TED Global conference in Edinburgh UK each summer, TED scope has broadened and now it includes the award-winning TED Talks video site, the Open Translation Project and TED Conversations, the inspiring TED Fellows, TEDx programs, and the annual TED Prize<sup>4</sup>. In

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<sup>4</sup> TED Conference is a four days event in North American West Coast. TEDGlobal is again a four days’ meeting that is held in different countries—e.g. in Oxford (UK) in 2005, 2009, and 2010; in Arusha, Tanzania in 2007; in Edinburgh (Scotland, UK) in 2011, 2012, and 2013; in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2014. Other events included TEDIndia in November 2009; TEDWomen in Washington, DC in December 2010; in San Francisco, California in 2014. TEDYouth a special teenage-event held in New York City in 2011 and 2012; in New Orleans in 2014. TED Salons, evening-length events with speakers and performers. And finally, TED@, that is, events, exploring a topic or location in a particular city.

2006, a selected set of recorded conferences were released on the web for free as video content. Subtitling at TED is not only carried out through volunteering in fact “To seed the site” some of the most inspiring talks were “professionally translated into 20 languages. From there, the languages are determined entirely by our volunteer translators. A single individual can play a huge role in spreading ideas in his or her language”, as stated on TED website ([www.ted.com/pages/view/id/286](http://www.ted.com/pages/view/id/286)) to introduce a list of languages the talks are currently available in.

### **TED Talks—A New Hybrid Genre**

Talks at TED, as video-recorded live talks, are hybrid, multimodal, and multilingual texts typologies: *narratives* that are both spoken and written. The main topics—i.e. the one with a bigger number of talks (as of October 2013)—are from the following research fields: technology (517), entertainment (264), design (310), science (396), and global issues (372). Often following or presenting untracked paths in research or unconventional approaches, TED series of talks has become a non-standard genre in its own right that shows recognizable features such as first person narration despite the highly scientific content—i.e. figures and numbers, charts, graphs and other typically scientific visual aids; a frequent shift from a formal to an informal register; a tendency to combine terminology and specific purpose language to a more expressive and poetic one, by way of figures of speech, idioms, humour, irony, and even ambiguity. If there is a great investment in the speaker’s performance at the live event, the recorded video improves it thanks to a creative montage presenting speakers through a very dynamic up-to-date filming technique that allows viewers to enjoy the content offered from different angles and distances, ranging from speaker’s close-ups to a more inclusive speaker and audience framing or an overall stage view. Playing on distance and closeness, whenever storytelling or other narrative engaging techniques are employed or focusing on the audience to make the viewers feel part of it, these videos combine the features of short docu-films, standard presentations, and academic lecturing with a great deal of personal customizing and expressiveness both from the speakers and the video directors in media-specific ways.

Hardly ever denied a major role in successful talks, another typical technique largely employed in TED talks is storytelling. As talks are tailored to speakers’ personal styles, they are meant to exploit individual communication skills as much as background experience to play on the audience’s sympathy during the live event as if in a face-to face interaction. As David Herman, a scholar in contemporary narrative theory, who coined the term *postclassical narratology*, stated “Narratives do different things, and assumes different forms, in different communicative environments” (Biwu, 2005). Postclassical narratology is recognizing the role and different nature, and function storytelling plays across the media and therefore is integrating concepts, methods, and approaches to narrative analysis that was not included in the early narratologists’ toolkit. In fact, Herman has recently turned his attention to transmedial narratology, or the study of narrative across media (Herman, 2004).

The first dimension of story logic to be considered - the logic that stories are - involves the place of narrative within the broader logic of communication. Of concern here are features of narrative that enable storytellers as well as fiction writers to accomplish communicative aims in particular discourse environments, the ecologies of talk in which their narratives unfold (p. 57).

In TED Talks storytelling practice, as Herman argues, “It is inflected by the constraints and affordances associated with a given semiotic environment” (Biwu, 2005). Speakers are refraining from saying too much and

they fine-tune their *narratives* according to their main exigency, namely providing up-to-date scientific information without overloading the audience with too many data, rather re-contextualize, and reconceptualize by selecting and omitting in order to engage, attract, and entertain their audience.

Left to the viewers to choose from, the English script and a list of available subtitles, further enhance the dissemination of knowledge allowing viewers to opt for reading thus providing help on the language or the hearing front. In order to maintain the sort of emotional experience people live during the live event, TED ensures that volunteer translators acknowledge the crucial role played by each speaker's style and provides brief guidelines to remind its relevance (<http://www.ted.com/participate/translate/guidelines>).

*Informal over formal:* Where appropriate, choose informal, colloquial terms over formal or academic ones.

*Modern over traditional:* Choose modern terms and phrases over the traditional. Translators should strive to be up-to-date in the topics covered.

*Personal over generic:* Strive to match the tone and flow of the speaker's original talk. Rather than produce a word-for-word translation, aim to find the color, energy and "poetry" in the speaker's organic style and try to emulate it.

*Global over regional:* Choose words and phrases that can be most universally understood among all dialects.

*Idioms:* Instead of a word-for-word translation, try finding a similar expression in the target language. If no equivalent can be found, opt for a translation that readers will find the least confusing, even if it is less colorful than the original.

Since each video comes with its own script, written and visual materials are electronically stored and easily accessible from a built-in search engine. Divided and classified according to topics, speakers, and to the languages in which they are subtitled, all talks are fully indexable by other search engines as well, and they can be treated as an original and multilingual corpus—a large and structured set of texts in English and in many other languages.

As this paper has briefly tried to show, subtitling and translation have become the tools to spread multimodal and multilingual *narratives*. Delivering a speech about a new scientific approach or a new theory is also about telling a personal story that of an individual research path or of the peculiar circumstances that first lead the speaker to a particular field or approach. This stress on the human factor and on describing first-hand experience is also related to another recurring pattern in TED talks, namely speaking as much about success as about failure thus exploiting one of the greatest ingredient of any good story, legend, myth or fairy tale where countless plots rely on this archetypical pattern of success and failure.

### **TED Talks: Translation as Reconceptualization and Recontextualization of Expert Discourse**

In the Open Translation Project at TED, "volunteers range from well-organized groups working together in their own language, to lone translators working individually and matched by TED with others". Since each user chooses his/her favourite video, most of the volunteer translators are first and foremost passionate followers of the website. People enjoy videos as viewers/listeners first and then they pick out one and apply to sign up as translators in the Open Translation Project—only started in 2009 with technology partner dotSUB.com and only recently with Amara.com. When accepted, users are given access to a dedicated section of the website where they can browse through a list of available translation tasks/talks and choose as they please. To help ensure quality, a professional English transcript for each talk is generated and is the base upon

which all translations are carried out. Once talks are translated a second fluent speaker reviews the translation before TED publishes it. All translators and reviewers are credited by name for their work.

The success of the project is crystal clear and shown by the figures and numbers provided on the website (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Figures Taken From TED—www.ted.com—As of October 14th 2013*

Published translations	Translations in progress
102 languages	159 languages
10,642 translators	2,943 translators
47,497 translations	13,132 translations

These numbers have increased at an extraordinary pace: As of May 2014 translators had grown to 16,527, and translations to 57,653. Though some data may confirm what can be easily guessed about who is translating more and from which culture—see French spoken in France with 2,041 talks in Table 2 below; it is not always obvious who is most interested in carrying out the translation jobs and works harder to make the TED video-content available in his/her own native culture—compare talks available in Arabic to the ones in Hebrew. If Somali, Hausa, Amharic Ingush, and Khmer had only one talk translated as of October 2013, other less spoken languages such as Afrikaans, Kazakh, Tibetan were moving beyond the 10 units (see Table 2 below).

Table 2

*Figures Taken From TED Talks—www.ted.com—As of October 14th 2013*

Languages with the most translated talks—above 1000 units only	Languages with the least translated talks—above 10 units
Arabic 1,615	Afrikaans 19
Bulgarian 1,412	Belarusian 14
Chinese (Simplified) 1,566	Burmese 21
Chinese (Traditional) 1,759	Gujarati (India) 14
Dutch 1,535	Icelandic 10
French (France) 2,041	Kannada (India, Karnataka) 11
German 1,558	Kazakh 10
Greek 1,089	Macedo 11
Hebrew 2,021	Montenegrin 19
Hungarian 1,113	Nepali 21
Italian 1,895	Norwegian, Nynorsk 10
Japanese 1,295	Serbo-Croatian 12
Korean 1,758	Swahili 19
Persian 1,037	Tagalog (Philippines) 14
Polish 1,623	Tajik (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) 11
Portuguese (Brazilian) 1,979	Telugu (India) 15
Romanian 1,843	Tibetan 14
Russian 1,642	Uyghur (Uyghur Region, Western China) 15
Serbian 1,061	
Spanish 2,362	
Turkish 1,309	
Vietnamese 1,047	

Various aspects are worth exploring relative to these figures but here it will only briefly touch on the ones that seem most related to getting a better understanding of how and what TED is doing to reconceptualize and re-contextualize expert discourse and to what extent it is a tool of knowledge dissemination.

First, people are faced with an impressive number of languages—many of which are either unknown or long forgotten by the majority. Interestingly though, the languages that score higher in the number of translated talks are an odd bunch that shows (see below Table 3) how “like the Internet, crowdsourcing recognizes no boundaries” (Howe, 2008, p. 17) and no geo-political partition.

Accounting for an extremely distinct number of speakers, the most popular language in TED is neither the ones most widely spoken, nor the stronger ones in a traditional sense. The translations completed in the first six languages (Table 3) might be the result of people living in Italy, France, or Brazil, but does not deny that translators might be among those who left their country and contributed to a global diaspora or are L2 speakers at an advanced level.

Table 3

*Languages With the Most Translated Talks (Only Above 800 Units). Figures Taken From TED Talks as of May 6th 2011; February 13th 2012; October 14th 2013*

	Languages with the most translated talks (only above 800 units)—2011-2013		
	year 2011	year 2012	year 2013
Italian	867	1,062	1,895
French (France)	877	1,059	2,041
Spanish	878	1,055	2,362
Arabic	825	1,049	1,615
Bulgarian	867	1,051	1,412
Portuguese (Brazil)	862	1,052	1,979

Second, it is also dealing with a far larger than expected variety of geolects—e.g. Gujarati, Kannada, and Telugu in India in Table 2, but the list of languages spoken in India featuring on TED is longer and includes Malayalam, Hindi, and Bengali. This piece of information shows how widely TED is received and how competitive native tongues still are, as they struggle to survive despite any lingua-franca and how they are not yet reduced to dwindling local vernaculars—e.g. Catalan and Basque also feature along with Spanish in TED. In this respect, it is worth mentioning a recent article issued on TED Blog and written by Krystian Aparta<sup>5</sup>, telling the story of a Kazakh journalist translating TED talks in Kazakh which somehow expands on how crowdsourcing translation can become an empowering tool for less well-known languages and cultures.

“I wanted to put Kazakh into a global conversation”, says Yerkinbay, who, through his NGO, Minber, both teaches journalism and coaches young journalists in how to use new media in the remote areas of his country. He wants to empower Kazakh-speaking reporters to get involved in the global news community. But this is an uphill battle, because people think Kazakh—one of 23 languages spoken in Kazakhstan—lacks contemporary scientific and academic terminology. [...] So, I want to show them: Look, here’s the Open Translation Project and here are TED Talks in Kazakh. With these videos, I want to prove to them that Kazakh can be a medium of the global conversation on what’s new in science.

Knowledge sharing is therefore crucial, but it is as equally important as the way native speakers’ volunteering aims at various goals among which preserving a language, teaching it, enriching its glossary when

<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://blog.ted.com/2014/06/05/why-a-kazakh-journalist-is-translating-ted-talks/>

languages have lost out on their referential function in a variety of registers and topics. Back to the scene is thus the translator as *amateur* “whose object in translating had more to do with circulating the contents of a given work than with exploring the formal properties of the text” (Bassnett, p. 13). Yet, there are two main reasons why the present translator—at least in TED project—is somehow similar but in a different position. On the one hand, TED translators are definitely working to allow people in their mother-tongue to experience the same inspiring encounters with people and knowledge they first had; in fact, speakers of less-dominant languages are extremely active in spite of odd circumstances (looking at the second column in Table 2 it could easily trace where in the world the Internet is still poorly available). On the other hand, the “master-servant relationship with the SL text” is rarely the case since subtitling is most of the time a challenge on producing an accurate if brief adaptation of an English script is not only originating from an English-speaking country.

Since its launching, TED has hosted English-speakers only, however, they were not all Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, British or Irish, but included speakers from Africa, India, Venezuela, or Europe with good English skills. Knowledge and research results and approaches are therefore not only supplied by an English-speaking culture as it is traditionally understand it, but come from all over the globe accounting for an inclusive approach to innovation and “ideas worth sharing”.

When Nicholas Olster forecasts that English will have no successor because none will be needed and it is technology that will fill that need, it seems natural to go back to online crowdsourcing and volunteering. What is there behind it? Why are both digital natives and digital migrants more and more involved? What are the reasons that encourage people to work for free? Yet, maybe these are not accurate enough questions. What matters most rather is: Is technology allowing more and more tech savvy people to exercise control over products as much as knowledge supply? People volunteer on the internet in many different fields and for many different reasons. What started as “look at me and at what I can do” quickly turned into “let’s see if somebody wants to hire me”, i.e. nothing too far off or too genuine than promoting one’s own skills. But in the early days, one other main reasons for being out there on the web had also to do with getting started in a totally new dimension or world, celebrating individuality, and getting involved in some sort of cutting-edge activity with others who shared the same interests, passions, ideas, etc.. Communities grew out of a real need to find and virtually meet other people and share experiences in a virtual world—for many a more appealing condition, precisely because of distance and little need to turn up anywhere in a face-to-face meet up.

Now researchers provide long lists of different reasons as to why people give their expertise for free and take part in clearly profitable businesses, knowing they will not get any share out of it for themselves. Yet, many believe that a strong motivating factor is just the feeling of being there, gaining popularity, authority, and reputation (a new currency in the online world) in a field that is not the one “chosen” for making a living. Others think that people volunteer because they really want to enable others—from their national/language community—to enjoy such rich and inspiring material and boost innovative thinking and innovation in their country. Or it may well be that a good story is always worth telling and therefore translating.

## Conclusion

Websites like TED Talks and MOOCs are going to provide an increasing amount of material, text types, as well as new interaction patterns in the next years. A closer analysis of this richness should be of extraordinary interest for web-mediated knowledge dissemination, corpora linguistics, and translation studies. All online edutainment translation crowdsourcing will obviously impact to different degrees on various cultures

but to what extent and how is yet to be appreciated and understood. Whether so-called minor languages will really benefit from crowdsourcing and the new web-mediated knowledge dissemination is an altogether different matter that would be equally interesting to tackle. Translation remains a controversially received activity and yet it might be conceived as an empowering tool for languages and people that have so far been confined to the margins.

As for corpus linguistics, TED Talks video-content is already indexable and widely available as a multilingual corpus that can be further divided in sub-corpora for a deeper insight on the very nature of these hybrid edutainment videos as well as on the different topics they deal with.

Scientific and expert discourse is re-mediated in online edutainment videos as its multimodal storyworld creates a code-switching between the video-content and the script—i.e. the spoken face-to-face interaction as opposed to the written text devoid of all prosodic features (intonation, emphasis, voice pitch, etc.). A thorough understanding of the role played by the film language in these multimodal narratives as compared to their narrative techniques could contribute to a better framing of their final message and impact. Deixis for instance creates complexity rather than fulfilling its reference function of verbal pointing as any speaker points to “a larger ecology of talk, a communicative environment encompassing multiple spoken discourse genres or text types”. Deixis is tied to the speaker’s context of origin (where s/he is from) but depends equally on the live conference location (time and space of speech delivery), on the other’s speeches that might be quoted (and often are), on the speaker’s more general background culture and his/her scientific area of expertise and discourse. In addition, beyond the speakers’ background, culture or field of interest, the visual aids, the audience reactions to humour, intonation, face expression, or body language provide further meaning/reference that shapes the final message demanding disambiguation on the viewer’s part that might fall into the trap of the above mentioned code-switching between different cultural schemata (spoken and written).

Furthermore, since these videos are multimodal and multilingual edutainment, moving beyond linguistic issues, discourse analysis could inquire into the dominant ideology they convey, taking into account what is unsaid and unwritten (yet communicated) as well. Finally, to effectively understand figures and numbers relative to TED Talks popularity among viewers, it would be worth dealing with them from a socio-linguistic perspective—e.g. analysing which cultures score higher as readers when compared to which are more active in crowdsourcing translation and why.

This preliminary overview aimed at describing the state of the art of web-mediated edutainment through combining different perspectives. Many are the issues intentionally left open and far from providing an exhaustive portrait of this as yet extremely dynamic context, this contribution sought to create new opportunities for discussion. Hopefully, some intriguing questions have been raised and will trigger further research.

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