

Spoken Language Technology: Where Do We Go From Here?

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Recent years have seen dramatic developments in the capabilities and applications of spoken language technology. From a few niche applications for a range of expensive solutions, the field has developed to the point where keenly-priced products have swept the awards at consumer electronics shows. Speech recognisers has reached the high-street store, and a significant proportion of the developed world's population has now been exposed to the possibility of controlling one's computer, or creating a document, by voice.

This apparent progress in spoken language technology has been fuelled by a number of developments: the relentless increase in desktop computing power, the introduction of statistical modelling techniques, the availability of vast quantities of recorded speech material, and the institution of public system evaluations.

However, our understanding of the fundamental patterning in speech has progressed at a much slower pace, not least in the area of its high-level linguistic properties. Spoken language understanding continues to be an elusive goal, and the prosodic linkage between acoustic and linguistic patterning is still something of a mystery.

This talk will illuminate these issues, and will conclude with an analysis of the options for future spoken language R&D.