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LBSC 622 Tech Demo Paper

*Usability of the Dragon Naturally Speaking App*

The Dragon NaturallySpeaking set of services, developed by the Nuance Corporation, is probably the most well known suite of speech recognition software. The original product, intended for use on a PC or Mac, is a tool that allows a person to dictate speech through a headset, while the words appear as text on the screen. This software is used by those with dexterity problems and dyslexia, but also by people who just want to have a faster method of transferring information into a text document. The cost of the original system is $100 for a personal use PC version and $199 for the Mac or small business versions. Features include social media commands to post to Facebook and Twitter, the ability to dictate documents, email and instant messages with your voice, and tools to surf the Web through an included microphone/headset (Nuance, 2012).

This paper discusses the iPhone app developed to mimic the computer version. The app is free (and also available for Android systems, though I have only focused on the usability of the iPhone version for reasons of access). The app has many of the same features as the desktop version, including direct speech-to-text functionality and the ability to send the text through emails or copy the text onto the phone’s clipboard. In addition, the app has a built in function to send the text as a text message. The app does not include web searchability options, but it appears from the Nuance website that there are separate products available for this functionality. The user group is likely similar to the computer program, though one could see a wider audience due to the cost and the mobile functionality.

The app really could not be easier to use. Once it has been downloaded from the Apple app store, one merely has to open it, press the red button in the center of the screen to record, and start talking. Once finished, press the button again and the text appears on the screen. There is a conveniently located arrow on the bottom of the screen that offers the options to send the text to email, text message, or the clipboard. If the app is closed, the text disappears, so you simply complete the same steps every time you want to use the app.

The benefit to using the product depends on the user’s reasons for using it. If someone hates typing on the iPhone keyboard (or has trouble with this due to manual dexterity problems), the speech-to-text functionality is useful. If a user has problem with spelling due to dyslexia-related issues, having the function to speak instead of struggling to type is helpful to transmit ideas to the phone. In these ways, the tech enhances both the physical and intellectual accessibility of a mobile device. A more universal usability function is that (according to the product website), speaking instead of typing is supposed to be three times faster, saving the user time and energy.

Cultural institutions could adopt the tech in their settings by encouraging users to try their product on their own devices. Installing the desktop version on select library computers would be incredibly useful for some users, though there would be problems with noise control in the general area. That might be a way to utilize solitary study rooms. The app is likely limited in use in libraries, but having instructional classes on the variety of products available for speech-to-text functionality would be something universally usable for patrons. There is the potential for use of the product in the classroom, perhaps as a note taking tool, though the efficacy of the speech recognition with children’s voices would have to be tested thoroughly before use. The interface is certainly simple enough for this user group, however.

There are a few negatives to the app. For one thing, the user must have access to a Smartphone device, which is often cost-prohibitive for many users. In addition, depending on one’s voice control, the device has more errors than the website purports it to have. For example, I attempted to dictate a message and had about ten errors in one paragraph, whereas YouTube videos of people testing the product show users generally much more successful in their dictation. There might be some practice required to really get this to work as effectively as it is supposed to. Finally, the text produced by text-to-speech practices is hard to edit, especially for those with dexterity problems or dyslexia. If a user is one who has more than the average number of errors produced through speaking, the functionality of the product would be more limited.

All of that said, the product is free, so it is a good one to try if a user is looking to switch to or just occasionally utilize speech-to-text products. The interface is easy to use and, with a little practice, could become incredibly useful for certain users.

**References**

Nuance Corporation. (2012). Dragon. Retrieved from: <http://www.nuance.com/talk/?utm_medium=ps&utm_source=Google&utm_campaign=Dragon&utm_term=dragon_natural_speaking>