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English/Persian Voice-to-Voice Translation Tool

Jun 27, 2005

(Persian Journal)

Three years of work by a large interdisciplinary team at the University of Southern California has created a rudimentary but working two-way voice translation system that allows an English-speaking doctor to talk to a Persian-speaking patient.

The Transonics Spoken Dialog Translator turns a doctor's spoken English questions into spoken Persian, and translates patients' spoken Persian replies into spoken English.

Shrikanth Narayanan leads the large multidisciplinary USC Viterbi School team that developed Transonics. One member of this team presented a report on the system June 25 at the Association for Computational Linguistics conference in Ann Arbor Michigan.

"Fluent two-way machine voice translation is one of the holy grails of engineering," said Narayanan, an associate professor of electrical engineering, computer science and linguistics at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering who directs the Speech Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL) in the Viterbi School's Integrated Media Systems Center.

"We are years away from perfecting it, but we think the choices we have made about how to go about creating such a system are working. We hope to have something that will be useful in emergency rooms or ambulances within two years or so."

The system that exists, funded by two DARPA grants totalling \$3.8 million, is a result of intensive research in information technology, critically supplemented by careful observation of patient-doctor dynamics in numerous bilingual interaction sessions staged for the project.

Narayanan noted that the Transonics approach relies not just on computer code, but also on the ability of humans to use even imperfect tools. This approach, he adds, grows directly out of the extraordinary difficulty of the technical problems involved.

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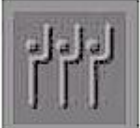
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