

Editor's Note

It was a long time ago, around 1980, that we bought for our laboratory a 19" wide and 6" high box containing a speech recognizer system. The system could recognize a maximum of about 70 different words after a long training period. The recognition rate then was still far below what we have now, but it worked and we could carry out our first experiments in controlling an electric wheelchair. We concluded the following:

- 1) It would take at least 10 to 15 years for speech recognition to reach a level of practical use, and we never expected a level of 100% continuous speech recognition to be realized. The automatic recognizer controlling the wheelchair was hardly doing the work due to environmental noise and difficulties in the training of the recognizer.
- 2) Steering of a wheelchair by an automatic speech recognizer was not a good option. This was based on an experiment with a simulated recognizer of speech: a blindfolded person controlled the joystick of the wheelchair by following the commands of the wheelchair user.

We are glad to see that the conclusions of that time

did not stop the research and developers doing their work: much progress has been made since the '80s. A good understanding of the prospects of machine-based speech recognition and production can only be achieved when we understand the technical and physical background of speech.

The Guest Editor, Prof. Dr. Klaus Fellbaum, has been very successful in composing and editing a special issue for *Technology and Disability* on speech, background and applications in the field where it is most wanted and makes a difference in life: people with disabilities. I am grateful and thank him for his professional and painstaking work.

We encourage our readers to think about topics for special issues: we see here an example of how our journal can contribute to the innovation in technologies to enhance the participation of people with disabilities in daily life.

Dr. Mathijs Soede
Editor-in-Chief
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