O-COCOSDA Kathmandu November 2010: Opening Talk

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Overview

Introduction

This is an informal talk, so I will do without a PowerPoint presentation, and instead look forward to many discussions with and insights from the conference participants. First I will say a few words about the COCOSDA group, second about the functions of COCOSDA, third about the development of COCOSDA in the past 10 years or so, as a pointer to possible developments in the future.

COCOSDA

COCOSDA is a group of researchers, developers and database agencies whose main function is to facilitate worldwide and multilingual multidisciplinary networking in the field of speech databases and assessment. The members are experienced speech scientists, some of whom, including myself, have been active in the area since the 1980s and before. I am particularly pleased to see my good friend Hiroya Fujisaki here, who has followed the development of the field from the very beginning. I should mention many other friends, of course, but perhaps it is sufficient here to thank the conference organisers for inviting me here, and Chiu-yu Tseng as Convenor of O-COCOSDA for so actively pushing the interests in the field further, with very impressive output such as the recent O-COCOSDA book.

COCOSDA functions

COCOSDA, the parent group, holds workshops for mutual information. When COCOSDA started, there were many separate initiatives of various kinds in different parts of the world concerned with the standardisation of speech resources and assessment methodologies. The initiatives included the European SAM and EAGLES projects, the Linguistic Data Consortium in the US, then ELRA/ELDA in Europe, and several other important initiatives in other countries. The motives behind these initiatives ranged from economy (speech databases are expensive to make) to knowledge-sharing. COCOSDA was created by experts in the field with a vision of sharing information and insights, and furthering the cause of standardisation not only of speech databases but also of the assessment of these databases and of speech systems in order to ensure minimum standards of quality control. Workshops were subsequently held, for many years with printed or internet proceedings. Parallel to this, I myself was involved in editing two handbooks, which appeard in 1997 and 2000, with the support of the EAGLES projects, which I think have also

supported the COCOSDA ideals.6. Future?

Changes

However, things have changed quite a lot since COCOSDA was originally founded. In Europe, some of the original functions of COCOSDA on the side of scientific research, development and publication in the field have been taken over by the European Community funded LREC conference, started by members of the SAM and EAGLES consortia, who were and are heavily6. Future? involved in COCOSDA and related NLP organisations. In a sense, I think that LREC can be claimed as a major success triggered by COCOSDA, among other agencies. However, Oriental COCOSDA, originally a regional organisation with more restricted goals, has developed over the years into the major wing of COCOSDA, with a strong record of activities in conferences, workshops and publication, and in particular a strong record of success in fulfilling the visions of the founders of COCOSDA: to create awareness of the multilingual, multidisciplinary nature of our field. O-COCOSDA has in a way become "the LREC of the East", or perhaps it is the other way round! So the COCOSDA group has been concentrating during the past few years on its core functions of networking and information sharing, with its regional and topical rapporteurs.

Terminology

This is not all that has been changing. The very terminology of the field has changed.

First, the term "speech" has been generalised from the studio recordings of the 1980s to cover not only paralinguistic features of speech, such as emotional speech and the "grunts" of everyday conversation, as Nick Campbell calls them, but also the partly language independent, partly language-specific gestures which accompany, support, and sometimes also contradict speech, and the need for cooperation with written text specialists has also become clearer, in areas ranging from speech translation through language models to Optical Character Recognition.

Second, the term "speech database" has been generalised to the notion of "speech resources", which cover the traditional recordings and annotations, but also increasingly the tools needed to process them into usable system data.

Third, the term "assessment" is seen in a highly sophisticated sense these days, and the term "evaluation" has become the more general term on the international level, covering diagnostic system evaluation to field performance evaluation. And of course crowd sourced evaluation has become a major strategy in this area, which could not have been dreamed of when COCOSDA was founded.

Fourth, other communities such as documentary linguistics, which is concerned with heritage documentation and endangered languages, have arisen, which share the same needs as much of the speech community, and are slowly - and sometimes reluctantly - realising this.

Future?

So, finally, what do I see as the future of COCOSDA? I see COCOSDA as a growing network, with the subnetworks, initiative, conferences, workshops of regional areas providing exciting input on resources for the new kinds of application which are appearing almost every month with each new smartphone, PDA and GIS product. At the moment an African COCOSDA is slowly developing,

and initial meetings have already been held in the past two or three years, under the aegis of the COCODA Africa region rapporteur, Justus Roux. In the domain of the topic rapporteurs I see the main impulses as coming from the regional initiatives, so the work of the topic rapporteurs in the future will consist of harvesting information from regional - and also relevant worldwide - events. It has sometimes been suggested that COCOSDA would serve the community better as an ISCA SIG, but I think that this is a serious misconception of the function and utility of both ISCA SIGs and of COCOSDA, and I do not see the future of COCOSDA as going in this direction, though of course multiple levels of cooperation will continue to occur. Unlike many other initiatives, COCOSDA is not funded, or rather it is funded voluntarily by its members by virtue of their own contribution, from their own research and development project and department budgets.

Thanks once again to the conference organisers and to the motor spirits behind O-COCOSDA. I look forward to many discussions, from which I hope to learn a lot about current developments in the O-COCOSDA domain.