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The SIWIS database: a multilingual speech database with acted emphasis

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Abstract

We describe here a collection of speech data of bilingual and trilingual speakers of English, French, German and Italian. In the context of speech to speech translation (S2ST), this database is designed for several purposes and studies: training CLSA systems (cross-language speaker adaptation), conveying emphasis through S2ST systems, and evaluating TTS systems. More precisely, 36 speakers judged as accentless (22 bilingual and 14 trilingual speakers) were recorded for a set of 171 prompts in two or three languages, amounting to a total of 24 hours of speech. These sets of prompts include 100 sentences from news, 25 sentences from Europarl, the same 25 sentences with one acted emphasised word, 20 semantically unpredictable sentences, and finally a 240-word long text. All in all, it yielded 64 bilingual session pairs of the six possible combinations of the four languages. The database is freely available for non-commercial use and scientific research purposes.

Index Terms: speech-to-speech translation, speech corpus, bilingual speakers, emphasis

1. Introduction

In the context of speech-to-speech translation (S2ST), the SIWIS research project¹ is a Swiss-NSF-funded project gathering several research teams in Switzerland and the CSTR (University of Edinburgh) [1]. It was inspired by the EMIME project [2] in which languages such as English, Japanese, Mandarin and Finnish, were involved. For SIWIS, we focused on the three main official languages in Switzerland (French, German, Italian) and English. Besides, an additional purpose of SIWIS is an attempt of conveying speaker intents through prosody.

Tsiartas et al. [3] showed in a large scale human evaluation framework that the perceived quality of S2ST was correlated with cross-lingual prosodic emphatic transfer. In other words, emphasising the correct words in the output language in TTS based on the emphasised words in the input language helps in the S2ST task. This observation motivates the need for emphasised data in our bilingual corpus, as parallel sentences in both the S2ST task. This observation motivates the need for emphasised and neutral version can be used for emphasis translation.

In this sense, the speech corpus should be useful for emphasis analysis, cross-lingual emphasis and intent transfer, cross-lingual adaptation with parallel speech from same speakers, cross-lingual studies in general. It has already been exploited successfully for emphasis detection evaluation [4, 5, 6]. The bilingual aspect of the database also enabled investigation on speakers’ prosody when they speak different languages[7].

The EMIME speech database was used as a basis for the design of the SIWIS database [8]. We recorded 36 accentless bilingual speakers (among which 14 trilingual ones) yielding 86 bilingual pairs of sets of 171 prompts in two of the four languages, i.e. almost 24 hours of speech. The reading material is mainly composed of news or parliamentary sentences. Besides, some sentences were repeated with some emphasis. Additionally, a 240-word text was read with some involvement.

In its second section, this contribution describes how the speakers were selected, whereas the third section gives details on how they were recorded on the reading material. Eventually, the fourth section shows additional annotations and processings such as labelling and alignment.

2. Speaker selection

All the speakers were selected on the basis of small recordings that could be done over the Internet on a dedicated webpage (http://bit.ly/bilinguals). Advertisement for this task was done through ads, flyers and mailing-lists within academic institutes, mainly Swiss universities (Geneva, Neuchâtel, Zurich) and international non-governmental organisations in Geneva.

On this webpage, the candidates were asked for their e-mail, age and for each language they would apply for, their A–B–C language level is generally used by translators and interpreters to denote respectively A as their main language, usually mother tongue, B as another active language of which they have an excellent command, and C as a passive language, which is used only as a source language for translation and interpretation.

All candidates answering to all information and having applied and recorded their voice in at least two languages were pre-selected and their recordings were sent to 3 (sometimes 4) native judges of each language. The judges were expert in linguistics and were asked to evaluate candidate for their accent-
ness in the different languages on a 0-3 scale with possibilities to add comments.

- 0 = strong foreign accent
- 1 = noticeable foreign accent
- 2 = very slight foreign accent
- 3 = no foreign accent

In this rating, “foreign accent” refers to non-native accent. For instance, the speech from a subject speaking French with a strong German accent would be rated as “strong foreign accent”. The region specific accents were not rated in this evaluation.

Discarding incomplete applications and candidates with only one recording, a total of 137 candidates were registered. Their age was 26 in average (s.d. 10 yrs) with a minimum at 10 and a maximum at 89. Most of them applied for 2 languages (91 bilingual speakers), about one third as trilingual speakers (39 candidates) and only 7 quadrilingual speakers. Table 1 shows for each recording the A-B-C level reported by the candidates.

Table 1: Total recordings per language (and % claiming to be A B C).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%A</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%B</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After evaluation by native judges, only a fraction of candidates were selected as speakers. The main rule was to select candidates with an average evaluation of 2.5 at least and with no evaluation below 2. In short, most of the speakers were evaluated with no foreign accents by all three judges (three '3's). A small proportion was evaluated with a slight foreign accent by one judge whereas the two others have evaluated him with no foreign accent (one '2' and two '3's). Some trilingual and quadrilingual candidate failing to have the required evaluation in one language, have then been selected for a lower number of languages. Table 2 depicts the average evaluation of speakers for each language.

Table 2: Average evaluation of candidates for each language. Scale used by the judges: 0 = strong foreign accent, 1 = noticeable accent, 2 = very slight accent, 3 = no foreign accent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>= 3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 2.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 86 recording sessions were combined accordingly to the wanted pair of languages into 64 pairs of recording sessions. The table below shows to the number of pairs of recording sessions per language.

Table 4: Number of pairs of recording sessions per language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language pair</th>
<th>Number of session pairs (male + female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French-English</td>
<td>20 (9 + 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-German</td>
<td>12 (5 + 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-Italian</td>
<td>13 (6 + 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-German</td>
<td>10 (3 + 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-Italian</td>
<td>5 (0 + 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German-Italian</td>
<td>4 (1 + 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64 (24 + 40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Recordings

This section describes the recording sessions per se. The selected bilingual speakers were paid CHF 60.- (and 90.- for trilingual speakers) and had to sign an informed consent. Each recording session (i.e. all the prompts in one language) took about 20 minutes and speakers could make a large pause between the two or three sessions. As the task could be exhausting, the weakest language was generally done first.

3.1. Reading material

The stimulus material was largely inspired by the EMIME bilingual corpus [8] to keep consistency and allow future studies involving both corpus. In our case, each set of 171 prompts for each language is divided in 5 parts as follows:

- EUROPARL (prompts numbered as 000 to 024): 25 Europarl statements among which 20 declaratives and 5 interrogatives. The Europarl corpus was used to have a parallel meaning across languages.
- NEWS (100-199): 100 sentences from newspapers among which 80 declaratives and 20 interrogatives.
- SUS (200-219): 20 semantically unpredictable sentences. e.g sentence #200 (of scenario A) – Le chien lutte sous la plage rouge.
- NEWS (100-199): 100 sentences from newspapers among which 80 declaratives and 20 interrogatives.
- FOCUS (300-324): 25 Europarl statements. These are the same as in part EUROPARL but one word, written in capital in the prompt, is emphasised, i.e pronounced with a focus.

- FOCUS (300-324): 25 Europarl statements. These are the same as in part EUROPARL but one word, written in capital in the prompt, is emphasised, i.e pronounced with a focus. e.g.
- Je VOIS ce que vous voulez dire

The reading material of EMIME consists in 25 Europarl sentences, 100 news sentences and 20 semantically unpredictable sentences (SUS)
– I SEE what you are saying.
– Ich VERSTEHE, was Sie meinen.
– CAPRICE quello che intende dire.

• PRINCE (400): Text reading “Le petit prince”. The selected continuous passage has a length of about 240 words with some interrogative sentences and some direct and indirect discourse. The text was presented as a single prompt to ensure consistency in the prosody. The speaker was asked to read it with involvement.

As a reminder, EUROPARL, SUS, FOCUS and PRINCE parts have a parallel meaning across the 4 languages. Moreover, to ensure variety in the uttered prompts, each language has 3 scenarios named A, B and C. In other words, each language has 3 different sets of prompts (keeping the parallel meaning across language within each scenario). Only the 5th part (PRINCE) is the same for all the speakers.

3.2. Hardware and software
The recordings took place in a anechoic booth in which a dynamic microphone SHURE MX418/C at 10-20 cm from the speaker with a pop shield, and a keyboard to control the prompts scrolling were placed. The prompts were visible to the subject on a screen outside of the booth. A frame screen was visible to the operator to supervise the session. The sound device USBPre2 was used to record the signal into a 44.1kHz-mono-16bits format.

The SpeechRecorder software (from the Institute of Phonetics and Speech Processing of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) was used to present the prompts one by one. The prompts were randomly mixed within the 4 first parts (i.e. excepted from the PRINCE part which was presented as a unique prompt). The speaker was presented the prompt on the screen, could take a few seconds to read it mentally, then pronounced it and had to press a key to either jump to the next prompt or re-record the same prompt. Redoing the same prompt was done in case of stuttering, hesitation or wrong reading. The speaker usually realized he had to restart the same prompt by himself. Nevertheless, the operator could also ask the speaker to do so.

3.3. Statistics on recordings
Table 5 sums up the number of sessions, sound files (prompts) and total duration per language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
<th>Total duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5332</td>
<td>512 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3771</td>
<td>350 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2903</td>
<td>266 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2738</td>
<td>287 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>14744</td>
<td>1415 min. ∼ 23.6 hrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Additional annotation
In addition to the audio recordings and corresponding transcriptions, we created labels that can be used for statistical parametric speech synthesis, or for speech analysis.

4.1. Label format
The labels were created to the HTS [9] full context format for three of the four languages: English, French and German. It consists of linguistic features at the phone, syllable, word, phrase, sentence levels, with information such as stress, accent, part-of-speech (for details, see the file lab_format.pdf in the HTS demo5). To create the labels, we used two different text analysis front end softwares: Festival for English and German [10], and eLite for French [11].

4.2. Alignment
The labels were forced aligned using Viterbi algorithm. We used HMM-based speech synthesis models to estimate the alignment of the labels from the audio. Our models were trained using speaker adaptive training [12]. For English, the models were trained on the Wall Street Journal database [13]; for German, we used PhonDat [14], and for French, we trained our models on BREF [15]. Almost all the English, French and German labels were forced aligned. No manual correction were done on the labels. The resulting labels provide alignment at the phone level and state level (where the states correspond to HMM states with standard settings).

4.3. Augmenting the labels with emphasis information
As part of the database contains acted emphasis, some of the labels were augmented with emphasis labels. In addition to the standard contextual features, we added a binary feature that corresponds to the question “is the current word emphasised?”. This additional feature was manually annotated on the labels aligned at the phone level for English, French and German, on the subsets A and C of the sentences containing emphasis. This additional information, together with the forced alignment, can be used for easy analyses of emphasised segments, or for training or adapting models which discriminate emphasis.

4.4. Current status of the annotations
Table 6 provides the number of files for which labels exist, the number of aligned labels which have emphasis marks, and the number of aligned words per language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Aligned labels</th>
<th>With emphasis marks</th>
<th>Aligned words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>4474</td>
<td>2434</td>
<td>65735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3597</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>41023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>2561</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>25660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10632</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td>128498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We plan to create labels for Italian data, and to align these in a similar fashion as for English, French and German. Some missing labels in the other languages also need to be aligned. Another task to be completed is the annotation of emphasis for all the sentences which comprise explicitly emphasised words.

5. Conclusion
This paper presented a speech database containing parallel speech recordings of bilingual and trilingual speakers in the official Swiss languages (French, German and Italian), as well as English. Another feature of the corpus is the word level emphasis acted by the speakers, in a parallel manner – both neutral

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4 [www.bas.uni-muenchen.de/Bas/software/speechrecorder/]

5 Available at [http://hts.sp.nitech.ac.jp/?Download]
and emphasised versions of the sentences are available. The data presented will thus enable studies on multilingual systems as well as on emphasis in a S2ST context. Some research has already been performed successfully using various aspects of the database.

Further refinements to this speech database include additional recordings to balance the language pairs. The creation and alignment of all the labels should also be performed, as well as the annotation of emphasis on the relevant files.

The database is freely available for non-commercial use and scientific research purposes at http://bit.ly/siwiData.

6. Acknowledgements

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7. References


