The Blizzard Challenge 2009

Evaluating corpus-based speech synthesis on common databases

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In order to better understand and compare research techniques in building corpus-based speech synthesizers on the same data, the Blizzard Challenges 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 were held. We are now pleased to make this preliminary announcement of the fifth challenge: Blizzard Challenge 2009.

The basic challenge is to take the released speech data, build synthetic voices, and synthesize a prescribed set of test sentences. The sentences from each synthesizer are then evaluated through extensive listening tests. The 2009 Challenge will be similar to the 2008 Challenge, but we plan to introduce one or two new aspects. A "hub and spoke" design will be used, allowing participants to opt in or out of some parts of the Challenge. Optional parts of the Challenge may include

1) very small datasets (probably requiring voice transformation or speaker-adaptive techniques),

2) synthesis of "contextually-appropriate" speech, and

3) synthesis of speech designed to be heard in background noise and/or via a telephone channel.

Further details will be announced in early 2009. We are planning to release two databases. CSTR (www.cstr.ed.ac.uk) will release a 15-hour UK English speech database and lexicon; this is the same database used in the 2008 challenge. The second database will be of Mandarin; this will be different to the data used in 2008. As usual, we hope to provide labels which participants may use if they choose.

Blizzard Workshop: The results will be presented at a workshop, which will be a satellite of INTERSPEECH 2009, UK (www.interspeech2009.org). The workshop will be held in the UK (location to be confirmed) immediately before or after INTERSPEECH. A condition of participation in the Blizzard Challenge is the submission of a paper to this workshop. Accepted papers will be presented at the workshop, and published on the Blizzard website.

Website: http://www.synsig.org/index.php/Blizzard_Challenge

Registration: Interested parties should register their intention to participate as soon as possible, by mailing blizzard@festvox.org. They should identify a contact person in their team, and provide email and postal addresses. A registration fee of USD 750 will be required to partially meet the costs of running the challenge and paying listeners. Payment method details will be announced later.

There is a mailing list for discussion and announcements, which all participants must join by sending a message to majordomo@festvox.org with the following line in the body of the message

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subscribe blizzard-discuss
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To post a message to the list, send it to blizzard-discuss@festvox.org

Provisional timeline

Feb	2009	Probable database release
Apr	2009	Test sentences released
Apr	2009	Deadline for submitting synthesized speech
Apr	2009	Evaluation system goes live
June	2009	End of evaluation
June	2009	Results distributed to teams
July	2009	Satellite workshop papers due
Aug	2009	Notification of acceptance
Sep	2009	Presentation of results at the satellite workshop, to be held in the UK
Sep 6-10	2009	INTERSPEECH 2009 in Brighton, UK

Further Information: For further information please contact blizzard@festvox.org.

A description of the challenge was published at Interspeech 2005:
http://www.festvox.org/blizzard/bc2005/IS051946.PDF