

# The LIMSI Continuous Speech Dictation System: Evaluation on the ARPA Wall Street Journal Task

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we report progress made at LIMSI in speaker-independent large vocabulary speech dictation using the ARPA Wall Street Journal-based CSR corpus. The recognizer makes use of continuous density HMM with Gaussian mixture for acoustic modeling and n-gram statistics estimated on the newspaper texts for language modeling. The recognizer uses a time-synchronous graph-search strategy which is shown to still be viable with vocabularies of up to 20K words when used with bigram back-off language models. A second forward pass, which makes use of a word graph generated with the bigram, incorporates a trigram language model. Acoustic modeling uses cepstrum-based features, context-dependent phone models (intra and interword), phone duration models, and sex-dependent models. The recognizer has been evaluated in the Nov92 and Nov93 ARPA tests for vocabularies of up to 20,000 words.

## INTRODUCTION

Our speech recognition research focuses on developing recognizers that are task-, speaker- and vocabulary-independent so as to be easily adapted to a variety of applications. In this paper we report on our efforts in large vocabulary, speaker-independent continuous speech recognition using the ARPA Wall Street Journal-based CSR corpus[11]. The WSJ corpus contains large amounts of read speech material from a large number of speakers and has associated text material which can be used as a source for statistical language modeling. The recognizer makes use of continuous density HMM with Gaussian mixture for acoustic modeling and n-gram statistics estimated on text material for language modeling. Acoustic modeling uses cepstrum-based features, context-dependent phone models, duration models, and sex-dependent models. Statistical n-gram language models are estimated on a large corpus of newspaper text from the WSJ. The recognizer has also been evaluated on comparable tasks for the BREF corpus and results were reported at EUROSPEECH-93[3]. In the following sections we describe the recognizer and present an evaluation of the current system on the last two sets of evaluation test material: Nov92[12] and Nov93.

## RECOGNIZER OVERVIEW

The recognizer uses a time-synchronous graph-search strategy which is shown to still be viable with vocabularies of up to 20K words, when used with bigram back-off language models (LMs). This one level implementation includes intra- and inter-word context-dependent (CD) phone models, intra- and inter-word phonological rules, phone duration models, and gender-dependent models[6]. The HMM-based word recognizer graph is built by putting together word models according to the grammar in one large HMM. Each word model is obtained by concatenation of phone models according to the word's phone transcription in the lexicon.

The recognizer makes use of continuous density HMM (CDHMM) with Gaussian mixture for acoustic modeling. The main advantage continuous density modeling offers over discrete or semi-continuous (or tied-mixture) observation density is that the number of parameters used to modelize an HMM observation distribution can easily be adapted to the amount of available training data associated to this state. In the experimental section we demonstrate the improvement in performance obtained on the same test data by simply using additional training material. As a consequence, high precision modeling can be achieved for highly frequented states without the explicit need of smoothing techniques for the densities of less frequented states. Discrete and semi-continuous modeling use a fixed number of parameters to represent a given observation density and therefore cannot achieve high precision without the use of smoothing techniques. This problem can be alleviated by tying some states of the Markov models in order to have more training data to estimate each state distribution. However, since this kind of tying requires careful design and some a priori assumptions, these techniques are primarily of interest when the training data is limited and cannot easily be increased.

**Front end:** A 48-component feature vector is computed every 10 ms. This feature vector consists of 16 Bark-frequency scale cepstrum coefficients computed on the 8kHz bandwidth with their first and second order derivatives. For each frame (30 ms window), a 15 channel Bark power spectrum is obtained by applying triangular win-

dows to the DFT output. The cepstrum coefficients are then computed using a cosinus transform [2].

**Acoustic models:** The acoustic models are sets of CD phone models, which include both intra-word and cross-word contexts, but are position independent. Each phone model is a left-to-right CDHMM with Gaussian mixture observation densities. The covariance matrices of all the Gaussians are diagonal. Duration is modeled with a gamma distribution per phone model. The HMM and duration parameters are estimated separately and combined in the recognition process for the Viterbi search. Maximum a posteriori (MAP) estimators are used for the HMM parameters[4] and moment estimators for the gamma distributions. Separate male and female models are used to more accurately model the speech data. The contexts to be modeled are selected based on their frequency of occurrence in the training data and are position independent.

**Lexicon:** The lexicon is represented phonemically using a set of 46 phonemes. The lexicon has alternate pronunciations for some of the words, and allows some of the phones to be optional. A pronunciation graph is generated for each word from the baseform transcription to which word internal phonological rules are optionally applied during training and recognition to account for some of the phonological variations observed in fluent speech.

**Language Model:** Bigram and trigram-backoff[5] language models are estimated on the WSJ training text material which contains about 37 million words. The backoff mechanism for the bigram has been efficiently implemented using a tree. The LM size can be arbitrarily reduced by relying more on the backoff, a property used in the first decoding pass. The trigram language model is used in the second pass of the decoding process.

**Decoding:** The recognizer uses a time-synchronous graph-search strategy which includes intra- and inter-word CD phone models, intra- and inter-word phonological rules, phone duration models, and a bigram language model. Sex identification is performed for each sentence using phone-based ergodic HMMs[8]. The recognizer is then run using the set of models corresponding to the identified sex. Sentence recognition is performed in two forward passes. First, a word graph is generated using a bigram language model. Second, the sentence is decoded using the acoustic models and the word graph with the trigram language model. Both passes use a time-synchronous Viterbi decoder.

**Phonological Rules:** Phonological rules are used to allow for some of the phonological variations observed in fluent speech. The principle behind the phonological rules is to modify the phone network to take into account such variations. These rules are optionally applied during training and recognition. Using optional phonological rules during training results in better acoustic models, as they are

less “polluted” by wrong transcriptions. Their use during recognition reduces the number of mismatches. The mechanism for the phonological rules allows the potential for generalization and extension. A pronunciation graph is generated for each word from the baseform transcription to which word internal phonological rules are applied. In forming the word network, word boundary phonological rules are applied at the phone level to take into account interword phonological variations such as palatalization, voicing assimilation, or glide insertion.

Much of the system development has been carried out by performing phone recognition instead of word recognition in order to reduce the computational requirements and speed up the development process. We have shown that improvements in phone accuracy are directly indicative of improvements in word accuracy when the same phone models are used for recognition[7]. Phone recognition provides the added benefit that the recognized phone string can be used to understand errors in word recognition, and problems with the lexical representation.

## SEARCH STRATEGY

One of the most important problems in implementing a large vocabulary speech recognizer is the design of an efficient search algorithm to deal with the huge search space, especially when using long span language models such as trigrams. The most commonly used approach for small and medium vocabulary sizes is the one pass frame synchronous beam search [10] which uses a dynamic programming procedure. This basic strategy has been recently extended by adding other features such as “fast match”[14, 15], N-best rescoring [13], and progressive search[9]. The two pass approach used in our system is based on the idea of progressive search[9] where the information between levels is transmitted via word graphs.

The first pass uses a bigram-backoff language model with a tree organization of the lexicon for the backoff component. This one pass frame synchronous beam search generates a list of word hypotheses resulting in a word lattice. Two problems need to be considered at this level. The first is whether or not the dynamic programming procedure used in the first pass, which guarantees the optimality of the search for the bigram, generates an “optimal” lattice to be used with a trigram language model. For any given word the lattice will contain many hypotheses with different ending points but only a few with different starting points. This problem was in fact less severe than expected since the time information is not critical to generate an “optimal” word graph from the lattice, i.e. the multiple word endings provide enough flexibility to compensate for single word beginnings.

The second consideration is that the lattice generated in this way cannot be too large or there is no interest in a two pass approach. To solve this second problem, two pruning

thresholds are used during the first pass, a beam search pruning threshold which is kept to a level insuring almost no search errors (from the bigram point of view) and a word lattice pruning threshold used to control the lattice size.

A description of the exact procedure used to generate the word graph from the word lattice is beyond the scope of this paper. The following steps give the key elements behind the procedure.<sup>1</sup> First, a word graph is generated from the lattice by merging three consecutive frames (i.e. the minimum duration for a word in our system). Then, “similar” graph nodes are merged with the goal of reducing the overall graph size and generalizing the word lattice. This step is reiterated until no further reductions are possible. Finally, based on the trigram backoff language model a trigram word graph is then generated by duplicating the nodes having multiple language model contexts. Bigram backoff nodes are created when possible to limit the graph expansion.

To fix these ideas, let us consider some numbers for the WSJ 5k closed vocabulary. The first pass generates a word lattice containing on average 10,000 word hypothesis per sentence, with the pruning threshold set to have a negligible number of search errors. The generated word graph before trigram expansion contains on average 1400 arcs. After trigram expansion, based on a trigram backoff LM there are on average 3900 word instantiations including silences which are treated the same way as words.

It should be noted that this decoding strategy based on two forward passes can in fact be implemented in a single forward pass using one or two processors. We are using a two pass solution because it is conceptually simpler, and also due to memory constraints.

## THE LIMS WSJ SYSTEM

The DARPA WSJ corpus[11] was designed to provide general-purpose speech data with large vocabularies. Text materials were selected to provide training and test data for 5K and 20K word, closed and open vocabularies, and with both verbalized (VP) and non-verbalized (NVP) punctuation. For testing purposes, the 20k closed vocabulary includes all the words in the test data whereas the 20k open vocabulary contains only the 20k most common words in the WSJ texts. The 20k open test is also referred to as a 64k test since all of the words in these sentences occur in the 63,495 most frequent words in the normalized WSJ text material[11]. Two sets of standard training material have been used for these experiments: The standard WSJ0 SI-84 training data which include 7240 sentences from 84 speakers, and the standard set of 37518 WSJ0/WSJ1 SI-284 sentences from 284 speakers. Only the primary microphone data were used for training.

While we have built n-gram-backoff LMs directly from the 37M-word standardized WSJ training text material, in these experiments all results are reported using the 5k or

<i>5k - Conditions</i>	<i>Corr.</i>	<i>Subs.</i>	<i>Del.</i>	<i>Ins.</i>	<i>Err.</i>
Nov92, si84a, bg*	91.8	6.9	1.3	1.5	9.7
Nov92, si84b, bg	94.4	5.0	0.6	0.9	6.6
Nov92, si284, bg	96.0	3.6	0.3	0.9	4.8
Nov92, si284, tg	97.7	2.1	0.2	0.8	3.1
Nov93, si84b, bg	91.9	6.2	1.9	1.3	9.4
Nov93, si284, bg	94.1	4.8	1.2	0.9	6.8
Nov93, si284, tg	95.5	3.5	1.1	0.8	5.3

**Table 1:** 5k results - Word recognition results on the WSJ corpus with bigram/trigram (bg/tg) grammars estimated on WSJ text data. \*official ARPA NOV92 evaluation results.

20k, bigram and trigram backoff LMs provided by Lincoln Labs[11] as required by ARPA so as to be compatible with the other sites participating in the tests.

The lexicon is represented using a set of 46 phones. The training and test lexicons were created at LIMS and include some input from the TIMIT, Pocket and Moby lexicons. Missing forms were generated by rule when possible, or added by hand. Some pronunciations for proper names were kindly provided by Murray Spiegel at Bellcore from the Orator system. A pronunciation graph is associated with each word so as to allow for alternate pronunciations, including optional phones. Word boundary phonological rules are applied in building the phone graph used by the recognizer. For the present, only well known phonological rules have been incorporated in the system. These rules include word-internal rules for glide insertion, stop deletion, and homorganic stop insertion. The interword rules include palatalization, stop reduction, and voicing assimilation.

## Experimental Results

The WSJ corpus provides a wealth of material that can be used for system development. In our experiments, we have worked primarily with the WSJ0-Dev (410 sentences, 10 speakers), and the WSJ1-Dev from spokes s5 and s6 (394 sentences, 10 speakers). Development was done with the 5k closed vocabulary system in order to reduce the computational requirements. The Nov92 5k and 20k nvp test sets were used to assess progress during this development phase.

The LIMS WSJ system was evaluated in the Nov92 DARPA evaluation test for the 5k-closed vocabulary using the standard bigram language models[11] with the WSJ0 si-84 training data. The official reported results are given in the first line of Table 1 using 493 CD models (si84a), without the second derivative of the cepstral coefficients. Increasing the number of CD models and the number of features (si84b), reduced the error rate by about 30% over the system used for the Nov92 evaluation. The same model set gave a word error of 9.4% on the Nov93 test data. Using the combined WSJ0/WSJ1 si-284 training data reduces the error by about 27% for both tests. When a trigram LM is used in the second pass, the word error is reduced by 35% on the Nov92 test and by 22% on the Nov93 test.

Results are given in the Table 2 for the Nov92 nvp 64k test

<sup>1</sup>In our implementation, a word lattice differs from a word graph only because it includes word endpoint information.

20k - Conditions	Corr.	Subs.	Del.	Ins.	Err.
Nov92, si84c, bg	88.3	10.1	1.5	2.0	13.6
Nov92+, si84c, bg	86.8	11.7	1.5	2.7	15.9
Nov92+, si284, bg	91.6	7.6	0.8	2.6	11.0
Nov92+, si284, tg	93.2	6.2	0.6	2.3	9.1
Nov93+, si284, bg	87.1	11.0	1.9	2.3	15.2
Nov93+, si284, tg	90.1	8.5	1.4	1.9	11.8

**Table 2:** 20k/64k results - Word recognition results with 20,000 word lexicon on the WSJ corpus. Bigram/trigram (bg/tg) grammars estimated on WSJ text data. +: 20,000 word lexicon with open test.

data using both open and closed 20k vocabularies. With si-84 training (si84c)<sup>2</sup> the word error rate is doubled when the vocabulary increases from 5k to 20k words and the test perplexity goes from 111 to 244. The higher error rate with the 20k open lexicon can be attributed to the out-of-vocabulary (OOV) words, which account for almost 2% of the words in the test sentences. Processing the same 20k open test data with a system trained on the si-284 training data, reduces the word error by 30%. The word error on the Nov93 20k test is 15.2% with the same system. The use of a trigram reduces the error rate by 18% on the Nov92 test and 22% on the Nov93 test.

The 20k trigram sentence error rates for Nov92 and Nov93 are 60% and 62% respectively. Since this is an open vocabulary test, the lower bound for the sentence error is given by the percent of sentences with OOV words, which is 26% for Nov92 and 21% for Nov93. In addition there are errors introduced by the use of word graphs generated by the first pass. The graph error rate (ie. the correct solution was not in the graph) was 5% and 10% respectively for Nov92 and Nov93. In fact, in most of these cases the errors should not be considered search errors as the recognized string has a higher likelihood than the correct string.

A final test was run using a 64k lexicon in order to eliminate the errors due to unknown words. (In principle, all of the read WSJ prompts are found in the 64k most frequent words, however, since the WSJ1 data were recorded with non-normalized prompts, additional OOV words can occur.) Running a full 64k system was not possible with the computing facilities available, so we added a third decoding pass to extend the vocabulary size. Starting with the phone string corresponding to the hypothesis of the trigram 20k system, an A\* algorithm is used to generate a word graph using phone confusion statistics and the 64k lexicon. This word graph is then used by the recognizer with a 64k trigram grammar trained on the standard WSJ training texts (37M words). Using this approach we recover only about 30% of the errors due to OOV words on the Nov93 64k test, reducing the word error to 11.2% from 11.8%.

<sup>2</sup>The si84c model set is slightly smaller than si84b model set.

## SUMMARY

In this paper, we have described the LIMSI Nov93 continuous speech dictation system. The system uses CDHMM with Gaussian mixture for acoustic modeling and n-gram statistics estimated on the newspaper texts for language modeling. The recognizer uses a time-synchronous graph-search strategy which is shown to still be viable with vocabularies of up to 20K words when used with bigram back-off language models. This one level implementation includes intra- and inter-word CD phone models, intra- and inter-word phonological rules, phone duration models, and gender-dependent models. For trigram language models, decoding is performed in two forward passes. The first pass generates a word graph using a bigram language model, this graph is then used in a second acoustic pass with the trigram language model. The recognizer has been evaluated in the Nov92 and Nov93 ARPA tests with vocabularies of up to 20,000 words.

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