

HUMAN-COMPUTER INTERACTION: OVERVIEW ON STATE OF THE ART

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper is to provide an overview on the subject of Human-Computer Interaction. The overview includes the basic definitions and terminology, a survey of existing technologies and recent advances in the field, common architectures used in the design of HCI systems which includes unimodal and multimodal configurations, and finally the applications of HCI. This paper also offers a comprehensive number of references for each concept, method, and application in the HCI.S

Keywords: Human-Computer Interaction, multimodal HCI, Ubiquitous Computing.

1.INTRODUCTION

Utilizing computers had always begged the question of interfacing. The methods by which human has been interacting with computers has travelled a long way.

The journey still continues and new designs of technologies and systems appear more and more every day and the research in this area has been growing very fast in the last few decades. The growth in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) field has not only been in quality of interaction, it has also experienced different branching in its history. Instead of designing regular interfaces, the different research branches have had different focus on the concepts of multimodality rather than unimodality, intelligent adaptive interfaces rather than command/action based ones, and finally active rather than passive interfaces. This paper intends to provide an overview

on the state of the art of HCI systems and cover most important branches as mentioned above. In the next section, basic definitions and terminology of HCI are given. Then an overview of existing technologies and also recent advances in the field is provided. This is followed up by a description on the different architectures of HCI designs. The final sections pertain to description on some of the applications of HCI and future directions in the field.

2.HUMAN-COMPUTER INTERACTION: DEFINITION, TERMINOLOGY

Sometimes called as Man-Machine Interaction or Interfacing, concept of Human-Computer Interaction/Interfacing (HCI) was automatically represented with the emerging of computer, or more generally machine, itself. The reason, in fact, is clear: most sophisticated machines are worthless unless they can be used properly by men. This basic argument simply presents the main terms that should be considered in the design of HCI: functionality and usability [1]. Why a system is actually designed can ultimately be defined by what the system can do i.e. how the functions of a system can help towards the achievement of the purpose of the system. Functionality of a system is defined by the set of actions or services that it provides to its users. However, the value of functionality is visible only when it becomes possible to be efficiently utilised by the user [2]. Usability of a system with a certain functionality is the range and degree by which the system can be used efficiently and adequately to accomplish certain goals for certain users. The actual effectiveness of a system is achieved when there is a proper balance between the functionality and usability of a system [3].

Having these concepts in mind and considering that the terms computer, machine and system are often used interchangeably in this context, HCI is a design that should produce a fit between the user, the machine and the required services in order to achieve a certain performance both in quality and optimality of the services [4]. Determining what makes a certain HCI design good is mostly subjective and context dependant. For example, an aircraft part designing tool should provide high precisions in view and design of the parts while a graphics editing software may not need such a precision. The available technology could also affect how different types of HCI are designed for the same purpose. One example is using commands, menus, graphical user interfaces (GUI), or virtual reality to access functionalities of any given computer. In the next section, a more detailed overview of existing methods and devices used to interact with computers and the recent advances in the field is presented

3.RECENT ADVANCES IN HCI

In following sections, recent directions and advances of research in HCI, namely intelligent and adaptive interfaces and ubiquitous computing, are presented. These interfaces involve different levels of user activity: physical, cognitive, and affection.

4.EXISTING HCI TECHNOLOGIES

HCI design should consider many aspects of human behaviours and needs to be useful. The complexity of the degree of the involvement of a human in interaction with a machine is sometimes invisible compared to the simplicity of the interaction method itself. The existing interfaces differ in the degree of complexity both because of degree of functionality/usability and the financial and economical aspect of the machine in market. For instance, an electrical kettle need not to be sophisticated in interface since its only functionality is to heat the water and it would not be cost-effective to have an interface more than a thermostatic on and off switch. On the other hand, a simple website that may be limited in functionality should be complex enough in usability to attract and keep customers [1].

Therefore, in design of HCI, the degree of activity that involves a user with a machine should be thoroughly thought. The user activity has three different levels: physical [5], cognitive [6], and affective [7]. The physical aspect determines the mechanics of interaction between human and computer while the cognitive aspect deals with ways that users can understand the system and interact with it. The affective aspect is a more recent issue and it tries not only to make the interaction a pleasurable experience for the user but also to affect the user in a way that make user continue to use the machine by changing attitudes and emotions toward the user [1]

The focus of this paper is mostly on the advances in physical aspect of interaction and to show how different methods of interaction can be combined (Multi-Modal Interaction) and how each method can be improved in performance (Intelligent Interaction) to provide a better and easier interface for the user. The existing physical technologies for HCI basically can be categorized by the relative human sense that the device is designed for. These devices are basically relying on three human senses: vision, audition, and touch [1]

Input devices that rely on vision are the most used kind and are commonly either switch-based or pointing devices [8] [9]. The switch-based devices are any kind of interface that uses buttons and switches like a keyboard [10]. The pointing devices examples are mice, joysticks, touch screen panels, graphic tablets, trackballs, and pen-based input [11]. Joysticks are the ones that have both switches and pointing abilities. The output devices can be any kind of visual display or printing device [3].

The devices that rely on audition are more advance devices that usually need some kind of speech recognition [12]. These devices aim to facilitate the interaction as much as possible and therefore, are much more difficult to build [13]. Output auditory devices are however easier to create. Nowadays, all kind of non-speech [14] and speech signals and messages are produced by machines as output

signals. Beeps, alarms, and turn-by-turn navigation commands of a GPS device are simple examples.

The most difficult and costly devices to build are haptic devices [15]. “These kinds of interfaces generate sensations to the skin and muscles through touch, weight and relative rigidity [1].” Haptic devices [16] are generally made for virtual reality [17] or disability assistive applications [18].

The recent methods and technologies in HCI are now trying to combine former methods of interaction together and with other advancing technologies such as networking and animation. These new advances can be categorized in three sections: wearable devices [19], wireless devices [20], and virtual devices [21]. The technology is improving so fast that even the borders between these new technologies are fading away and they are getting mixed together. Few examples of these devices are: GPS navigation systems [22], military super-soldier enhancing devices (e.g. thermal vision [23], tracking other soldier movements using GPS, and environmental scanning), radio frequency identification (RFID) products, personal digital assistants (PDA), and virtual tour for real estate business [24]. Some of these new devices upgraded and integrated previous methods of interaction. As an illustration in case, there is the solution to keyboarding that has been offered by Compaq’s iPAQ which is called Canesta keyboard as shown in figure 1. This is a virtual keyboard that is made by projecting a QWERTY like pattern on a solid surface using a red light. Then device tries to track user’s finger movement while typing on the surface with a motion sensor and send the keystrokes back to the device [25].

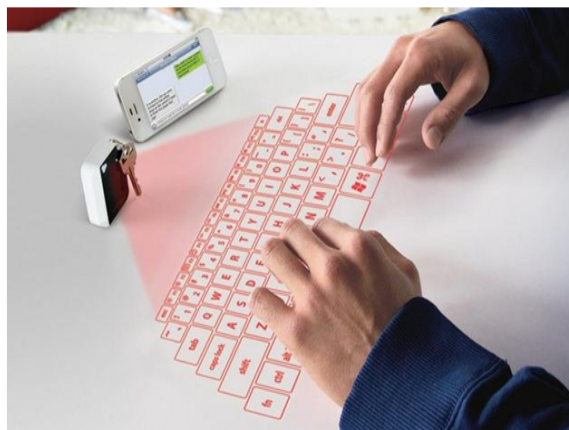


Figure 1: canasta virtual keyboard

5.UBIQUITOUS COMPUTING AND AMBIENT INTELLIGENCE

The latest research in HCI field is unmistakably ubiquitous computing (Ubicomp). The term which often used interchangeably by ambient intelligence and pervasive

computing, refers to the ultimate methods of human-computer interaction that is the deletion of a desktop and embedding of the computer in the environment so that it becomes invisible to humans while surrounding them everywhere hence the term ambient.

The idea of ubiquitous computing was first introduced by Mark Weiser during his tenure as chief technologist at Computer Science Lab in Xerox PARC in 1998. His idea was to embed computers everywhere in the environment and everyday objects so that people could interact with many computers at the same time while they are invisible to them and wirelessly communicating with each other [26].

Ubicomp has also been named the Third Wave of computing. The First Wave was the mainframe era, many people one computer. Then it was the Second Wave, one person one computer which was called PC era and now Ubicomp introduces many computers one person era [26]. Figure 2 shows the major trends in computing.

6.MULTIMODAL HCI SYSTEMS

The term multimodal refers to combination of multiple modalities. In MMHCI systems, these modalities mostly refer to the ways that the system responds to the inputs, i.e. communication channels [27]. The definition of these channels is inherited from human types of communication which are basically his senses: Sight, Hearing, Touch, Smell, and Taste. The possibilities for interaction with a machine include but are not limited to these types. Therefore, a multimodal interface acts as a facilitator of human-computer interaction via two or more modes of input that go beyond the traditional keyboard and mouse. The exact number of supported input modes, their types and the way in which they work together may vary widely from one multimodal system to another. Multimodal interfaces incorporate different combinations of speech, gesture, gaze, facial expressions and other non-conventional modes of input. One of the most commonly supported combinations of input methods is that of gesture and speech. Although an ideal multimodal HCI system should contain a combination of single modalities that interact correlatively, the practical boundaries and open problems in each modality oppose limitations on the fusion of different modalities. In spite of all progress made in MMHCI, in most of existing multimodal systems, the modalities are still treated separately and only at the end, results of different modalities are combined together.

An interesting aspect of multimodality is the collaboration of different modalities to assist the recognitions. For example, lip movement tracking (visual-based) can help speech recognition methods (audio-based) and speech recognition methods (audio-based) can assist command acquisition in gesture recognition (visual-based).

7.CONCLUSION

Human-Computer Interaction is an important part of systems design. Quality of system depends on how it is represented and used by users. Therefore, enormous amount of attention has been paid to better designs of HCI. The new direction of research is to replace common regular methods of interaction with intelligent, adaptive, multimodal, natural methods.

Ambient intelligence or ubiquitous computing which is called the Third Wave is trying to embed the technology into the environment so to make it more natural and invisible at the same time. Virtual reality is also an advancing field of HCI which can be the common interface of the future. This paper attempted to give an overview on these issues and provide a survey of existing research through a comprehensive reference list.

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