

## Old and new blended: shorthand and speech recognition software

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The international "Intersteno" Congress is the occasion to review the main progresses done on technical products and computer-based programs that allow us to make accounts more easily, faster and with lower costs. In this viewpoint it seemed like stenography would fail to compare to other account systems, faster in theory, because to enter data in a computer you must use a keyboard. In effects it is known that entering data with a keyboard can't increase the speed beyond certain limits.

In this point of view vocal recognition systems were introduced. From the Intersteno Congress in Losanna, voice recognition systems had achieved such notable progresses, that we are now able to dictate at a speed of 140-150 words\min., with high standards of precision.

By the time I had the opportunity to give the Intersteno Board a demonstration on the utility of this product in accounting (in Palermo), there has been a further evolution, because a further updated voice recognition program version has come out, offering even higher performances.

This allows us to finish the first account part, the entering of non-corrected data, in a much easier and faster way than with a keyboard, and then to proceed at the correction of mistakes and reviewing of the text, an operation that must anyway take place. This system allows a 4-member stenography team to produce a sufficiently correct account at the end of the meeting: this way we surpassed a gap that was attributed by many stenotypists to stenography. In fact, using this system allows a "real time account" at lower prices.

I put this term in quotation marks, because in my opinion, whatever method is used, it's impossible to proceed editing a full account in real time. In fact, to be able to draft an account it is essential to understand the concepts expressed by the orator, who most of the times is too carried away in the heat of the discussion to express himself following syntactic rules and suitable terms.

In other words, the spoken style is very different from the written style. While the orator delivers his speech, his only aim is to be understood, in the given time, by the audience in the meeting and in the public, while the person who produces the account is the performer that must make the speech comprehensible and clear to both present and non-present audience. He has all the time he needs to understand and make concepts clear, complying with all syntactic rules, erasing repetitions, adding subjects and complements in the right places, using correct verbal tenses and appropriate terms. To do so it is necessary to think, sometimes make a research on dictionaries, encyclopedias or even the Internet, consult foreign dictionaries to make appropriate quotations in foreign languages.

This work of "cleaning" wouldn't be possible in real time, without the aid of an extra person. The operator who is copying down what the orator is saying, hasn't got the time to stop and think, and he doesn't always understand the terms and general ideas of the orator. In this case, it's impossible for him to give the right punctuation, which is a very important part. It is known from centuries that the famous response of the "Sibilla Cumana" had a opposite meaning just by moving a comma: "IBIS, REDIBIS NON, MORIERIS IN BELLO" (you will go, you won't come back, you will die during the battle) meant an unfavorable outcome, while the opposite: "IBIS, REDIBIS, NON MORIERIS IN BELLO" (you

will go, you will come back, you won't die during the battle) forecasted a happy return back home of the warrior.

Obviously the vocal recognition system can be used by stenotypists. It can also be used by those who make an account listening to a recorded tape: in this case, though, the operation is considerably slower, because you can't listen and repeat at the same time, especially if the orator speaks fast. In this case, even if you use the speed control, you have to listen to maximum four or five words, stop the recorder for a moment, dictate those four or five words, then listen again to the recorded tape, and repeat this operation forever; whereas a stenography sheet can be read over at the same speed of the orator, if not faster, and you can look at an entire paragraph: this allows you to punctuate in a more correct way and start the reviewing of the text eliminating repetitions and evident syntactic mistakes.

You can also read the sheet, using the vocal recognition system to write down the text, and listen to the recorded tape at the same time, integrating the text if necessary: for example if some word had been misunderstood during the stenography-transcription or if the orator had been speaking too fast

This is how an old discipline like stenography, that seemed destined to disappear even though it has many incomparable advantages in practice, gets powered from the most modern and widespread computer based programs in vocal recognition, becoming itself modern, up to date, effective, competitive.