Acknowledgment

This volume is the result of a scholarly collaboration that has borne much fruit, beginning in the Fall of 1996. Both of us had been hired by the University of Pittsburgh’s Johnstown Campus during the previous spring. One of us, John Mullennix, was a cognitive psychologist who specialized in psycholinguistics. The other, Steven Stern, was a social psychologist who had been examining how technological change led to changes in social interaction. Although we had much in common in many ways, neither of us guessed that we had any common ground for research endeavors.

Midway through our first semester, however, during a lunch, we discussed some of the research we had conducted earlier in our careers. John had been involved in research on perception and comprehension of synthetic speech with Dr. David Pisoni during a postdoctoral fellowship position at Indiana University. This work was purely cognitive, if not perceptual, in nature. As a student of the impacts of technological change, Steve wondered, out loud, if there had been any work on social psychological reactions to computerized voice. To our surprise, very little research in this area had been performed. Soon enough, we were conducting a series of studies of persuasiveness of computer synthesized speech, eventually examining how perceptions of disability played a role in how people felt about users of synthetic speech.

Over the years, our interest in the use of computer synthesized speech intensified and expanded. The work first focused on simple differences in attitudes toward natural and synthetic speech. Eventually, we found that the listener’s knowledge about the disability status of a synthetic speech user was important, as well as the purpose that a spoken passage was being used for. This work has led us to incorporate scholarly findings in the area of prejudice and stereotyping into our research program. As we look at our research today, we realize that one never knows which direction research findings will take you.

Both of us would like to acknowledge the following people who were instrumental in our research over the years. A multitude of undergraduate researchers have worked with us on issues related to computer synthesized speech. These include Stephen Wilson, Corrie-Lynn Dyson, Benjamin Grounds, Robert Kalas, Ashley Davis Fortier, Elizabeth Steinhauser, Donald Horvath, Lynn Winters and Ilya Yaroslavsky. Without their enthusiastic assistance, diligent efforts, and their insights and intellectual curiosity, we would not have been able to be as productive in our research program.

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John Mullennix
Steven Stern
Editors