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Leeds Accents Needed For Brummie Study

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Engineers from the University of Birmingham's spin out company The Speech Ark are looking for people with local accents for a study that will help them to develop better speech recognition systems for personal computers and other applications.

Speech recognition software is already available for personal computers from high street stores and is being more widely used in mobile phones, cars and over the telephone network. However speech recognition does not take into account the way in which English is spoken throughout the British Isles and currently works best for people with standard southern British accents.

Researchers at the Department of Electronic, Electrical and Computer Engineering aim to measure the effects of these accents on the performance of speech recognition systems and to improve the performance of these systems for different accents by recording speech in different locations in the British Isles ranging from Scotland, Eire and Wales to the south of England.

Professor Martin Russell, lead investigator, says 'People adapt to new accents very quickly, but it is extraordinarily hard to make computers do the same. Not only is this type of data important for speech technology research, it also gives a valuable snapshot of the diversity of accents in the British Isles at the start of the 21st century.'

Participants from the Leeds area are needed for this research on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st October at the Pudsey Library on Church Lane in Pudsey, Leeds. They need to have lived in the Leeds area all their lives and have parents who come from and have lived in the Leeds area. Each person will be asked to read a set of words, sentences and paragraphs and the session will last for approximately 30 minutes. All participants will be paid £15 each for their time and can ring 0800 0789 114 or email: info@thespeechark.com giving their name and a contact telephone number.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

The Speech Ark is a new spin-off company from the University of Birmingham's School of Engineering which develops spoken language resources for use by universities and companies.

The team is present in Leeds on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st October at the Pudsey Library, Pudsey, Leeds, LE28 7TY.

Martin Russell is available for interview. Please ring the numbers below if you would like to speak to him.

For further information

Kate Chapple, Press Officer, University of Birmingham, tel 0121 414 2772 or 07789 921164.

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